



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

HD WIDENER



HW PLF4 S

10448.37.5
B

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

From the Library of

JOHN LIVINGSTON LOWES

Professor of English 1918-1930

Francis Lee Higginson Professor of English
Literature 1930-1945

HAZLITT ON ENGLISH LITERATURE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
APPRECIATION OF LITERATURE

BY
JACOB ZEITLIN, PH.D.

ASSOCIATE IN ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

NEW YORK
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
AMERICAN BRANCH: 35 WEST 57TH STREET
LONDON, TORONTO, MELBOURNE, AND BOMBAY
HUMPHREY MILFORD

1913

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

10448.37.5

B

✓



LE 7 1913

Copyright, 1913
BY OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
AMERICAN BRANCH

PREFACE

[illegible][illegible]

The above information is given to you for your information. It is not intended to be used for any other purpose.

practice. The notes, in addition to identifying quotations and explaining allusions, indicate the nature of Hazlitt's obligations to earlier and contemporary critics. They contain a body of detailed information, which may be used, if so desired, for disciplinary purposes. The text here employed is that of the last form published in Hazlitt's own lifetime, namely, that of the second edition in the case of the *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, the lectures on the poets and on the age of Elizabeth, and the *Spirit of the Age*, and the first edition of the *Comic Writers*, the *Plain Speaker*, and the *Political Essays*. A slight departure from this procedure in the case of the essay on "Elia" is explained in the notes. "My First Acquaintance with Poets," and "Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen" are taken from the periodicals in which they first appeared, as they were not republished in book-form till after Hazlitt's death. Hazlitt's own spellings and punctuation are retained.

To all who have contributed to the study and appreciation of Hazlitt, the present editor desires to make general acknowledgement—to Alexander Ireland, Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, Mr. Birrell, and Mr. Saintsbury. Mention should also be made of Mr. Nichol Smith's little volume of Hazlitt's *Essays on Poetry* (Blackwood's), and of the excellent treatment of Hazlitt in Professor Oliver Elton's *Survey of English Literature from 1780 to 1830*, which came to hand after this edition had been completed. A debt of special gratitude is owing to Mr. Glover and Mr. Waller for their splendid edition of Hazlitt's *Collected Works* (in twelve volumes with an index, Dent 1902-1906). All of Hazlitt's quotations have been identified with the help of this edition. References to Hazlitt's own writings, when cited by volume and page, apply to the edition of Glover and Waller.

Finally I wish to express my sincere thanks to Professor G. P. Krapp for his friendly cooperation in the planning

PREFACE

v

and carrying out of this volume, and to him and to my colleague, Professor S. P. Sherman, for helpful criticism of the introduction.

JACOB ZEITLIN.

February 20, 1913.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
CHRONOLOGY OF HAZLITT'S LIFE AND WRITINGS	ix
INTRODUCTION	xi
I. THE AGE OF ELIZABETH	1
II. SPENSER	21
III. SHAKSPEARE	34
IV. THE CHARACTERS OF SHAKSPEARE'S PLAYS	
CYMBELINE	50
MACBETH	60
IAGO	72
HAMLET	76
ROMEO AND JULIET	84
MIDSUMMERNIGHT'S DREAM	85
FALSTAFF	88
TWELFTH NIGHT	96
V. MILTON	101
VI. POPE	118
VII. ON THE PERIODICAL ESSAYISTS	133
VIII. THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS	155
IX. CHARACTER OF MR. BURKE	172
X. MR. WORDSWORTH	191
XI. MR. COLERIDGE	205
XII. MR. SOUTHEY	216
XIII. ELIA	220
XIV. SIR WALTER SCOTT	227

CHAPTER		PAGE
XV.	LORD BYRON	236
XVI.	ON POETRY IN GENERAL	251
XVII.	MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETS	277
XVIII.	ON THE CONVERSATION OF AUTHORS	301
XIX.	OF PERSONS ONE WOULD WISH TO HAVE SEEN	315
XX.	ON READING OLD BOOKS	333
	NOTES	349

CHRONOLOGY OF HAZLITT'S LIFE AND WRITINGS

- 1778 William Hazlitt born at Maidstone in Kent, April 10.
 1783-1786 Residence in America.
 1787 ff. Residence at Wem in Shropshire.
 1793-1794 Student in the Hackney Theological College.
 1798 Meeting with Coleridge and Wordsworth.
 1798?-1805 Study and practice of painting.
 1802 Visit to Paris.
 1805 *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*.
 1806 *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*.
 1807 *An Abridgment of the Light of Nature Revealed*, by Abraham Tucker.
 Reply to the Essay on Population by the Rev. T. R. Malthus.
 Eloquence of the British Senate.
 1808 Marriage with Sarah Stoddart and settlement at Winterslow.
 1810 *A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue*.
 1812 Removal to London.—Lectures on philosophy at the Russell Institution.
 1812-1814 On the staff of the *Morning Chronicle*.
 1814 Begins contributing to the *Champion*, *Examiner*, and the *Edinburgh Review*.
 1816 *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft*.
 1817 *The Round Table*.
 The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.
 1818 *A View of the English Stage*.
 Lectures on the English Poets. (Delivered at the Surrey Institution.)
 1819 *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*. (Delivered at the Surrey Institution at the close of 1818.)
 A Letter to William Gifford Esq., from William Hazlitt Esq.
 Political Essays.
 1820 *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*.
 (Delivered at the Surrey Institution at the close of 1819.)
 Joins the staff of the *London Magazine*.
 1821-22 *Table Talk, or Original Essays* (2 volumes).
 1822 Episode of Sarah Walker.—Journey to Scotland to obtain a divorce from his wife.
 1823 *Liber Amoris, or the New Pygmalion*.
 Characteristics in the Manner of Rochefoucauld's Maxims.
 1824 *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England*.

x CHRONOLOGY OF HAZLITT'S LIFE AND WRITINGS

- Select British Poets.*
Marriage with Mrs. Bridgewater.—Tour of the Continent.
1825 *The Spirit of the Age.*
1826 *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy.*
The Plain Speaker, Opinions on Books, Men, and Things
(2 volumes).
1828-1830 *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (4 volumes).
1830 *Conversations of James Northcote.*
Death of William Hazlitt, September 18.

INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM HAZLITT

I

HAZLITT characterized the age he lived in as "critical, didactic, paradoxical, romantic."¹ It was the age of the Edinburgh Review, of the Utilitarians, of Godwin and Shelley, of Wordsworth and Byron—in a word of the French Revolution and all that it brought in its train. Poetry in this age was impregnated with politics; ideas for social reform sprang from the ground of personal sentiment. Hazlitt was born early enough to partake of the ardent hopes which the last decade of the eighteenth century held out, but his spirit came to ripeness in years of reaction in which the battle for reform seemed a lost hope. While the changing events were bringing about corresponding changes in the ideals of such early votaries to liberty as Coleridge and Wordsworth, Hazlitt continued to cling to his enthusiastic faith, but at the same time the spectacle of a world which turned away from its brightest dreams made of him a sharp critic of human nature, and his sense of personal disappointment turned into a bitterness hardly to be distinguished from cynicism. In a passionate longing for a better order of things, in the merciless denunciation of the cant and bigotry which was enlisted in the cause of the existing order, he resembled Byron. The rare union in his nature of the analytic and the emo-

¹ *Dramatic Essays*, VIII, 415.

tional gave to his writings the very qualities which he enumerated as characteristic of the age, and his consistent sincerity made his voice distinct above many others of his generation.

Hazlitt's earlier years reveal a restless conflict of the sensitive and the intellectual. His father, a friend of Priestley's, was a Unitarian preacher, who, in his vain search for liberty of conscience, had spent three years in America with his family. Under him the boy was accustomed to the reading of sermons and political tracts, and on this dry nourishment he seemed to thrive till he was sent to the Hackney Theological College to begin his preparation for the ministry. His dissatisfaction there was not such as could be put into words—perhaps a hunger for keener sensations and an appetite for freer inquiry than was open to a theological student even of a dissenting church. After a year at Hackney he withdrew to his father's home, where he found nothing more definite to do than to "solve some knotty point, or dip in some abstruse author, or look at the sky, or wander by the pebbled sea-side."² This was probably the period of his most extensive reading. He absorbed the English novelists and essayists; he saturated himself with the sentiment of Rousseau; he studied Bacon and Hobbes and Berkeley and Hume; he became fascinated, in Burke, by the union of a wide intellect with a brilliant fancy and consummate rhetorical skill.³ Though he called himself at this time dumb and inarticulate, and the idea of ever making literature his profession had not suggested itself to him, he was eager to talk about the things he read, and in Joseph Fawcett, a retired minister, he found an agreeable companion. "A heartier friend or honester critic I never coped

² "On Living to One's Self," in *Table Talk*.

³ "On Reading Old Books," pp. 344-45.

withal."⁴ "The writings of Sterne, Fielding, Cervantes, Richardson, Rousseau, Godwin, Goethe, etc. were the usual subjects of our discourse, and the pleasure I had had, in reading these authors, was more than doubled."⁵ How acutely sensitive he was to all impressions at this time is indicated by the effect upon him of the meeting with Coleridge and Wordsworth of which he has left a record in one of his most eloquent essays, "My First Acquaintance with Poets." But his active energies were concentrated on the solution of a metaphysical problem which was destined to possess his brain for many years: in his youthful enthusiasm he was grappling with a theory concerning the natural disinterestedness of the human mind, apparently adhering to the bias which he had received from his early training.

But being come of age and finding it necessary to turn his mind to something more marketable than abstract speculation, he determined, though apparently without any natural inclination toward the art, to become a painter. He apprenticed himself to his brother John Hazlitt, who had gained some reputation in London for his miniatures. During the peace of Amiens in 1802, he travelled to the Louvre to study and copy the masterpieces which Napoleon had brought over from Italy as trophies of war. Here, as he "marched delighted through a quarter of a mile of the proudest efforts of the mind of man, a whole creation of genius, a universe of art,"⁶ he imbibed a love of perfection which may have been fatal to his hopes of a career. At any rate it was soon after, while he was following the profession of itinerant painter through England, that he wrote to his father of "much dissatisfaction and much sorrow,"

⁴ "On Criticism," in *Table Talk*.

⁵ *Life of Holcroft*, Works, II, 171, n.

⁶ "On the Pleasure of Painting," in *Table Talk*.

of "that repeated disappointment and that long dejection which have served to overcast and to throw into deep obscurity some of the best years of my life."¹

When Hazlitt abandoned painting, he fell back upon his analytic gift as a means of earning a living. Not counting his first published work, the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, which was purely a labor of love and fell still-born from the press, the tasks to which he now devoted his time were chiefly of the kind ordinarily rated as job work. He prepared an abridgement of Abraham Tucker's *Light of Nature*, compiled the *Eloquence of the British Senate*, wrote a reply to Malthus's *Essay on Population*, and even composed an elementary English Grammar. It would be a mistake to suppose that these labors were performed according to a system of mechanical routine. Hazlitt impressed something of his
✓ personality on whatever he touched. His violent attack on the inhuman tendencies of Malthus's doctrines is pervaded by a glow of humanitarian indignation. For the *Eloquence of the British Senate* he wrote a sketch of Burke, which for fervor of appreciation and judicious analysis ranks with his best things of this class. Even the Grammar bears evidence of his enthusiasm for an idea. Whenever he has occasion to express his feelings on a subject of popular interest, his manner begins to grow animated and his language to gain in force and suppleness.

But Hazlitt continued firmly in the faith that it was his destiny to be a metaphysician. In 1812 he undertook to deliver a course of lectures on philosophy at the Russell Institution with the ambitious purpose of founding a system

¹ W. C. Hazlitt: *Lamb and Hazlitt* (1900), p. 44. The letter in which these phrases are to be found is dated 1793 by Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, but the present writer has given a detailed statement of his reasons for believing that it was written in 1803. See *Nation*, October 19, 1911.

of philosophy "more conformable to reason and experience" than that of the modern material school which resolved "all thought into sensation, all morality into the love of pleasure, and all action into mechanical impulse."^{*} Though he did not succeed in founding a system, he probably interested his audience by a stimulating review of the main tendencies of English thought from Bacon and Hobbes to Priestley and Godwin.

At the conclusion of his last lecture, Hazlitt told the story of a Brahmin who, on being transformed into a monkey, "had no other delight than that of eating cocoanuts and studying metaphysics." "I too," he added, "should be very well contented to pass my life like this monkey, did I but know how to provide myself with a substitute for cocoanuts." But it must have become apparent to Hazlitt and his friends that he possessed a talent more profitable than that of abstract speculation. The vigor and vitality of the prose in these lectures, compared with the heavy, inert style of his first metaphysical writing, the freedom of illustration and poetic allusion, suggested the possibility of success in more popular forms of literature. He tried to work for the newspapers as theatrical and parliamentary reporter, but his temper and his habits were not adaptable to the requirements of daily journalism, and editors did not long remain complacent toward him. He did however, in the course of a few years, succeed in gaining admission to the pages of the *Edinburgh Review* and in establishing an enviable reputation as a writer of critical and miscellaneous essays. Even in that anonymous generation he could not long contribute to any periodical without attracting attention. Readers were aroused by his bold paradox and by the tonic quality of his style. Editors appealed to him for "dashing articles," for something

^{*} XI, 26.

"brilliant or striking" on any subject. Authors looked forward to a favorable notice from Hazlitt, and Keats even declared that it would be a compensation for being damned if Hazlitt were to do the damning.

✓ In his essays the features of Hazlitt's personality may be plainly recognized, and these reveal a triple ancestry.

1 - He claims descent from Montaigne by virtue of his original observation of humanity with its entire accumulation of

2 - custom and prejudice; he is akin to Rousseau in a high-strung susceptibility to emotions, sentiments, and ideas; and

3 - he is tinged with a cynicism to which there is no closer parallel than in the maxims of La Rochefoucauld. The

union of the philosopher, the enthusiast, and the man of the

4 - world is fairly unusual in literature, but in Hazlitt's case the union was not productive of any sharp contradictions.

His common sense served as a ballast to his buoyant emotions; the natural strength of his feelings loosened the

bonds which attached him to his favorite theories; his cynicism, by sharpening his perception of the frailty of

human nature, prevented his philanthropic dreams from imposing themselves on him for reality.

5 - The analytical gift manifested itself in Hazlitt precociously in the study of human nature. He characterized

some of his schoolmates disdainfully as "fit only for fighting like stupid dogs and cats," and at the age of twelve, while

on a visit, he communicated to his father a caustic sketch of some English ladies who "require an Horace or a

Shakespeare to describe them," and whose "ceremonial unsociality" made him wish he were back in America. His

metaphysical studies determined the direction which his observation of life should take. He became a remarkable

6 - anatomist of the constitution of human nature in the abstract, viewing the motives of men's actions from a speculative plane. He excels in sharp etchings which bring the

outline of a character into bold prominence. He is happy in defining isolated traits and in throwing a new light on much used words. "Cleverness," he writes, "is a certain *knack* or aptitude at doing certain things, which depend more on a particular adroitness and off-hand readiness than on force or perseverance, such as making puns, making epigrams, making extempore verses, mimicking the company, mimicking a style, etc. . . . Accomplishments are certain external graces, which are to be learnt from others, and which are easily displayed to the admiration of the beholder, *viz.* dancing, riding, fencing, music, and so on. . . . Talent is the capacity of doing anything that depends on application and industry, such as writing a criticism, making a speech, studying the law." * These innocent looking definitions are probably not without an ironic sting. It requires no great stretch of the imagination, for example, to catch in Hazlitt's eye a sly wink at Lamb or a disdainful glance toward Leigh Hunt as he gives the reader his idea of cleverness or accomplishment.

Hazlitt's definitions often startle and give a vigorous buffet to our preconceptions. He is likely to open an essay on "Good-Nature" by declaring that a good-natured man is "one who does not like to be put out of his way. . . . Good-nature is humanity that costs nothing;" ¹⁰ and he may describe a respectable man as "a person whom there is no reason for respecting, or none that we choose to name." ¹¹ Against the imputation of paradox, which such expressions expose him to, he has written his own defence, applying his usual analytical acuteness to distinguish between originality and singularity. ¹² The contradiction of

* *Table Talk*, "On the Indian Jugglers."

¹⁰ *Round Table*.

¹¹ "On Respectable People," in *Plain Speaker*.

¹² "On Paradox and Commonplace," in *Table Talk*.

a common prejudice, which always passes for paradox, is often such only in appearance. It is true that an ingenious person may take advantage of the elusive nature of language to play tricks with the ordinary understanding, but it is equally true that words of themselves have a way of imposing on the uninquiring mind and passing themselves off at an inflated value. No process is more familiar than that by which words in the course of a long life lose all their original power, and yet they will sometimes continue to exercise a disproportionate authority. Then comes the original mind, which, looking straight at the thing instead of accepting the specious title, discovers the incongruity between the pretence and the reality, and in the first shock of the disclosure annoyingly overturns our settled ideas. This is the spirit in which Carlyle seeks to strip off the clothes in which humanity has irreducibly disguised itself, and it is the spirit in which Robert Louis Stevenson tries to free his old-world conscience from the old-world forms. To take a more recent parallel, it is the manner, somewhat exaggerated, in which Mr. G. K. Chesterton examines the upstart heresies of our own agitated day. There would be nothing fanciful in suggesting that all these men owed a direct debt to Hazlitt—Stevenson on many occasions acknowledged it.¹⁸ Hazlitt was as honest and

¹⁸ Hazlitt's *Table Talk* was included by Stevenson in a youthful *Catalogus Librorum Carissimorum*. It is interesting that at the same time that Carlyle was composing *Sartor Resartus*, Hazlitt should have penned this bit of savage satire. "It has been often made a subject of dispute, What is the distinguishing characteristic of man? And the answer may, perhaps, be given that *he is the only animal that dresses*. . . . Swift has taken a good bird's-eye view of man's nature, by abstracting the habitual notions of size, and looking at it in *great* or in *little*: would that some one had the boldness and the art to do a similar service, by stripping off the coat from his back, the vizard from his thoughts, or by dressing up some other creature in similar mummery! It is not his body alone

sincere as any of them. Though the opening of an essay may appear perverse, he is sure to enforce his point before proceeding very far. He accumulates familiar instances in such abundance as to render obvious what at first seemed paradoxical. He writes "On the Ignorance of the Learned" and makes it perfectly clear that no person knows less of the actual life of the world than he whose experience is confined to books. On the other hand he has a whole-hearted appreciation of pedantry: "The power of attaching an interest to the most trifling or painful pursuits, in which our whole attention and faculties are engaged, is one of the greatest happinesses of our nature. . . . He who is not in some measure a pedant, though he may be a wise, cannot be a very happy man."¹⁴ These two examples illustrate Hazlitt's manner of presenting both views of a subject by concentrating his attention on each separately and examining it without regard to the other. On one occasion he anatomizes the faults of the dissenters, and on another he extols their virtues. "I have inveighed all my

that he tampers with, and metamorphoses so successfully; he tricks out his mind and soul in borrowed finery, and in the admired costume of gravity and imposture. If he has a desire to commit a base or a cruel action without remorse and with the applause of the spectators, he has only to throw the cloak of religion over it, and invoke Heaven to set its seal on a massacre or a robbery. At one time dirt, at another indecency, at another rapine, at a fourth rancorous malignity, is decked out and accredited in the garb of sanctity. The instant there is a flaw, a 'damned spot' to be concealed, it is glossed over with a doubtful name. Again, we dress up our enemies in nicknames, and they march to the stake as assuredly as in *san Benitos*. . . . Strange, that a reptile should wish to be thought an angel; or that he should not be content to writhe and grovel in his native earth, without aspiring to the skies! It is from the love of dress and finery. He is the Chimney-sweeper on May-day all the year round: the soot peeps through the rags and tinsel, and all the flowers of sentiment!" *Aphorisms on Man*, LXIV. Works, XII. 227.

¹⁴ *Round Table*, "On Pedantry."

life against the insolence of the Tories, and for this I have the authority both of Whigs and Reformers; but then I have occasionally spoken against the imbecility of the Whigs, and the extravagance of the Reformers, and thus have brought all three on my back, though two out of the three regularly agree with all I say of the third party."¹⁵ The strange thing is not that he should have incurred the wrath of all parties, but that he should show surprise at the result.

- ✓ Very often Hazlitt's reflections are the generalization of his personal experience. The essay "On the Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority" is but a record of the trials to which he was exposed by his morbid sensitiveness and want of social tact, and amid much excellent advice "On the Conduct of Life," there are passages which merely reflect his own marital misfortunes. It is not so much that he is a dupe of his emotions, but in his view of life he attaches a higher importance to feeling than to reason, and so provides a philosophic basis for his strongest prejudices. "Custom, passion, imagination," he declares, "insinuate themselves into and influence almost every judgment we pass or sentiment we indulge, and are a necessary help (as well as hindrance) to the human understanding; to attempt to refer every question to abstract truth and precise definition, without allowing for the frailty of prejudice, which is the unavoidable consequence of the frailty and imperfection of reason, would be to unravel the whole web and texture of human understanding and society."¹⁶
- ✓ It is this infusion of passion and sentiment, the addition of the warm breath of his personal experience, that gives the motion of life to his analytic essays, and a deep and solemn humanity to his abstract speculations. Hazlitt felt

¹⁵ "Knowledge of the World," XII, 307.

¹⁶ "On Prejudice," XII, 396.

life with an intensity which reminds us of a more spacious age. "What a huge heap, a 'huge, dumb heap,' of wishes, thoughts, feelings, anxious cares, soothing hopes, loves, joys, friendships, it is composed of! How many ideas and trains of sentiment, long and deep and intense, often pass through the mind in only one day's thinking or reading, for instance! How many such days are there in a year, how many years in a long life, still occupied with something interesting, still recalling some old impression, still recurring to some difficult question and making progress in it, every step accompanied with a sense of power, and every moment conscious of the 'high endeavour and the glad success!'" "What an exultant sense of power over the resources of life! What an earnest delight in the tasting of every pleasure which the senses and the intelligence afford! His enjoyments comprehended the widest range of sensations and activities. He loved nature, he loved books, he loved pictures, he loved the theatre, he loved music and dancing. He loved good talk and good fellowship; he loved an idea and anyone who was susceptible to an idea. He also loved a spirited game of rackets, and though he hated brutality, he has left us a very vivid and sympathetic account of a prize-fight. Above all he loved the words truth and justice and humanity. With such sensibilities, it is no wonder that his last words should have been "I have had a happy life."

As the phrase is ordinarily understood, Hazlitt's dying expression might seem unaccountable. Outwardly few authors have been more miserable. Like the great French sentimentalist with whom we have compared him, a suspicious distrust of all who came near him converted his social existence into a restless fever. He had the gift of interpreting every contradiction to one of his favorite prin-

"*Table Talk*, "On the Past and Future."

✓ principles as a personal injury to himself, and in the tense state of party feeling then prevailing, the opportunities for taking offence were not limited. Hazlitt was one of the chief marks singled out for abuse by the critics of Government. To constant self-tormentings from within and persecution from without, there was added the misfortune of an unhappy marriage and of a still more unhappy love affair which lowered him in his own eyes as well as in the eyes of the world. From the point of view of the practical man, Hazlitt's life would be declared a failure.

The result of Hazlitt's hard experiences with the realities of life was to confirm him in a devoted attachment to the past. All his high enthusiasms, his sanguine dreams, his purest feelings continued to live for him in the past, and it was only by recurring to their memory in the dim distance that he could find assurance to sustain his faith. In the past all his experiences were refined, subtilized, transfigured. A sunny afternoon on Salisbury Plain, a walk with Charles and Mary Lamb under a Claude Lorraine sky, a visit to the Montpellier Gardens where in his childhood he drank tea with his father—occurrences as common as these were enveloped in a haze of glory. And rarer events, such as a visit to the pictures at Burleigh House, or to the galleries in the Louvre, tender visions of feminine grace and sweetness, were touched in the recollection with a depth and pathos which subdued even the most joyous impressions to a refined melancholy. In no other English ✓ writer is this rich sentiment of the past so eloquent, and no one was better qualified to describe its sources. "Time takes out the sting of pain; our sorrows after a certain period have been so often steeped in a medium of thought and passion, that they 'unmould their essence'; and all that remains of our original impressions is what we would wish them to have been. . . . Seen in the distance, in the long

perspective of waning years, the meanest incidents, enlarged and enriched by countless recollections, become interesting; the most painful, broken and softened by time, soothed."¹⁴ The "Farewell to Essay Writing" is perfumed with the odor of grateful memories from which the writer draws his "best consolation for the future." He almost erects his feeling for the past into a religion. "Happy are they," he exclaims, "who live in the dream of their own existence, and see all things in the light of their own minds; who walk by faith and hope; to whom the guiding star of their youth still shines from afar, and into whom the spirit of the world has not entered! . . . The world has no hold on them. They are in it, not of it; and a dream and a glory is ever around them!"¹⁵

But this impassioned sentiment for the past was only a refuge such as Byron might seek among the glories of by-gone ages or amid the solitary Alpine peaks, where it was possible to regain the strength spent in grappling with the forces of the actual world and return newly nerved to the battle. For fighting was Hazlitt's more proper element. He could hate with the same intensity that he loved, and his hatred was aroused most by those whom he regarded as responsible for the overturning of his political hopes. Politics had played the most important part in his early education. In his father's house he had absorbed the spirit of protest, accustomed himself to arguing for the repeal of the Test Act, and to declaiming against religious and political persecution. At the age of twelve he had written an indignant letter to the Shrewsbury Chronicle against the mob of incendiaries which had destroyed the house of Priestley, and as a student at Hackney he showed sufficient self-reliance to develop an original "Essay on Laws." The

¹⁴ *Table Talk*, "Why Distant Objects Please."

¹⁵ "Love of Power," XI, 268.

✓ defence of the popular cause was with him not an academic exercise, but a religious principle. "Since a little child, I knelt and lifted up my hands in prayer for it."²⁰ The emotional warmth of his creed was heightened by the reading of Rousseau, and in Napoleon it found a living hero on whom it could expend itself.

An uncompromising attachment to certain fundamental ✓ principles of democracy and an unceasing devotion to Napoleon constitute the chief elements of Hazlitt's political ✓ character. He sets forth his idea of representative government exactly in the manner of Rousseau when he proclaims that "in matters of feeling and common sense, of which each individual is the best judge, the majority are in the right. . . . It is an absurdity to suppose that there can be any better criterion of national grievances, or the proper remedies for them, than the aggregate amount of the actual, dear-bought experience, the honest feelings, and heart-felt ✓ wishes of a whole people, informed and directed by the greatest power of understanding in the community, unbiassed by any sinister motive."²¹ Hazlitt was not a republican, and he disapproved of the Utopian rhapsodies of Shelley, woven as they seemed of mere moonshine, without applicability to the evils that demanded immediate reform. • But he did insist that there was a power in the people to change its government and its governors, and hence grew his idolatry of Napoleon, who, through all vicissitudes, remained the "Child and Champion of the Revolution," the hero who had shown Europe how its established despots could be overthrown.

The news of Waterloo plunged Hazlitt into deep distress, as if it had been the shock of a personal calamity. According to Haydon, "he walked about unwashed, unshaven,

²⁰ *Life of Napoleon*, chap. 34.

²¹ "What is the People?" in *Political Essays*, III, 292.

hardly sober by day, always intoxicated by night, literally for weeks." But his disappointment only strengthened his attachment to his principles. These remained enshrined with the brightest dreams of his youth, and in proportion as the vision faded and men were beginning to scoff at it as a shadow, Hazlitt bent his energies to fix its outline and prove its reality. "I am attached to my conclusions," he says, "in consequence of the pain, the anxiety, and the waste of time they have cost me."²² His doctrines contained nothing that was subversive of social order, and their ultimate triumph lends the color of heroism to a consistency which people have often interpreted as proof of a limited horizon. It is at least certain that he did not put his conscience out to market, and that his reward came in the form of the vilest calumny ever visited upon a man of letters.

These were the most infamous years of the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, both of which had been founded as avowed champions of reaction. Their purpose was to discredit all writers whose politics or the politics of whose friends differed from the Government. Everybody knows of the fate which Keats and Shelley suf-

²² He tells of an experience in crossing the Alps which he intends should be symbolic of his whole life. From a great distance he thought he perceived Mont Blanc, but as the driver insisted that it was only a cloud, "I supposed that I had taken a sudden fancy for a reality. I began in secret to take myself to task, and to lecture myself for my proneness to build theories on the foundation of my conjectures and wishes. On turning round occasionally, however, I observed that this cloud remained in the same place, and I noticed the circumstance to our guide, as favoring my first suggestion; for clouds do not usually remain long in the same place. We disputed the point for half a day, and it was not till the afternoon when we had reached the other side of the lake of Neufchatel, that this same cloud rising like a canopy over the point where it had hovered, 'in shape and station proudly eminent,' he acknowledged it to be Mont Blanc." *Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy*. Works, IX, 296.

ferred at their hands, chiefly because they were friends of Leigh Hunt, who was the editor of a Liberal newspaper which had displeased George IV. Even the unoffending Lamb did not escape their brutality, perhaps because he was guilty of admitting Hazlitt to his house. The weapons were misrepresentation and unconfined abuse, wielded with an utter disregard of where the blows might fall, in the spirit of a gang of young ruffians who knew that they were protected in their wantonness by a higher authority. In the chastened sadness of his later years Lockhart, who was one of the offenders, confessed that he had no personal grudge against any of Blackwood's victims, in fact that he knew nothing about any of them, but that at the request of John Wilson, his fellow-editor, he had composed "some squibberies . . . with as little malice as if the assigned subject had been the court of Pekin." The sincere regret he expressed for the pain which his "jokes" had inflicted ought perhaps to be counted in extenuation of his errors. It may be true, as his generous biographer suggests, that "his politics and his feud with many of these men was an affair of ignorance and accidental associations in Edinburgh," that under different circumstances "he might have been found inditing sonnets to Leigh Hunt, and supping with Lamb, Haydon, and Hazlitt."²³ But meanwhile irreparable mischief had been done to many reputations, and the life of one man had been sacrificed to his sportiveness.²⁴

✓ The signal for the attack on Hazlitt was given by the Quarterly in connection with a review of *The Round Table*, Hazlitt's first book. The contents of this volume were

²³ Andrew Lang's *Life of Lockhart*, I, 63, 128-130.

²⁴ John Scott, the editor of the *London Magazine*, was killed in a duel arising from his retaliatory attacks on Lockhart and the Blackwood School of Criticism. See *London Magazine*, II, 509, 666; III, 76, and "Statement" prefatory to number for February, 1821.

characterized as "vulgar descriptions, silly paradox, flat truisms, misty sophistry, broken English, ill humour and rancorous abuse."²⁵ A little later, when the Characters of Shakespeare's Plays seemed to be finding such favor with the public that one edition was quickly exhausted, the Quarterly extinguished its sale by "proving that Mr. Hazlitt's knowledge of Shakespeare and the English language is on a par with the purity of his morals and the depth of his understanding."²⁶ The cry was soon taken up by the Blackwood's people in a series on the Cockney School of Prose. Lockhart invented the expression "pimpled Hazlitt." It so happened that Hazlitt's complexion was unusually clear, but the epithet clung to him with a cruel tenacity. When an ill-natured reviewer could find nothing else to say, he had recourse to "pimpled essays" or "pimpled criticism."²⁷ The climax of abuse was reached in an article entitled "Hazlitt Cross-Questioned," which a sense of decency makes it impossible to reproduce, and which resulted in the payment of damages to the victim. Even the publisher Blackwood speaks of it, with what sincerity it is not safe to say, as disgusting in tone, and Murray, who was the London agent for the Magazine, refused to have any further dealings with it. But the harm was done. Hazlitt could not walk out without feeling that every passer-by had read the atrocious article and saw the brand of the social outcast on his features.

In an atmosphere like this, it is scarcely to be wondered at if Hazlitt's temper, never of the amiable sort, should

²⁵ April, 1817.

²⁶ January, 1818

²⁷ "I have been reading Frederick Schlegel. . . . He is like Hazlitt, in English, who *talks pimples*—a red and white corruption rising up (in little imitations of mountains upon maps), but containing nothing, and discharging nothing, except their own humours." Byron's *Letters*, Jan. 28, 1821 (ed. Prothero, V, 191).

have become embittered, nor is it strange that he should sometimes, through ignorance, have committed the fault of which his enemies had been guilty in wantonness. Not content with retaliating the full measure of malice upon the heads of his immediate assailants, he turned the stream of
✓ his abuse upon Sir Walter Scott, whom he singled out deliberately as the towering head of a supposed literary conspiracy. He is credited with remarking: "To pay these fellows in their own coin, the way would be to begin with Walter Scott, and have at his clump foot."²⁸ Very mean-spirited this sounds to us, who are acquainted with the nobility of Scott's character and who know with what magnanimous wisdom he kept himself above the petty altercations of the day. But for Hazlitt, Sir Walter was the father-in-law and friendly patron of John Lockhart, he was the person who had thrown the weight of his powerful influence to make John Wilson Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh! He did not carry his prejudice against the Author of Waverley.

In some instances Hazlitt was consciously the aggressor, but his attacks were never wanton. He denounced Wordsworth and Coleridge and Southey because they were renegades from the cause which lay nearest to his heart. Their apostasy was an unforgivable offence in his eyes, and his wrath was proportioned to the admiration which he otherwise entertained for them. It is true that he treated their motives hastily and unjustly, but none of his opponents set him the example of charity. In the earlier years of their acquaintance Coleridge had spoken of Hazlitt as a "thinking, observant, original man," one who "says things that are his own in a way of his own,"²⁹ whereas after their

²⁸ Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke's *Recollections of Writers*, 147.

²⁹ Joseph Cottle: *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 465.

estrangement he discovered that Hazlitt was completely lacking in originality. Wordsworth, being offended at Hazlitt's review of the "Excursion," peevishly raked up an old scandal and wrote to Haydon that he was "not a proper person to be admitted into respectable society."³⁰ Perhaps Hazlitt was not as "respectable" as his poet-friends, but he had a better sense of fair play. At any rate, in a complete balancing of the accounts, Hazlitt's frequent displays of ill-temper are offset by the insidious, often unscrupulous baitings which he suffered from his opponents.

Naturally his bitterness was extended to his reflections on mankind in general. He felt as if the human race had wilfully deceived his sanguine expectations, and he poured out his grievances against its refractoriness, taking revenge for his public and his private wrongs, in a passage in which high idealism is joined with personal spite, in which he has revealed himself in all his strength and weakness, and involved his enemies in a common ruin with himself. It concludes the essay "On the Pleasure of Hating":

"Instead of patriots and friends of freedom, I see nothing but the tyrant and the slave, the people linked with kings to rivet on the chains of despotism and superstition. I see folly join with knavery, and together make up public spirit and public opinions. I see the insolent Tory, the blind Reformer, the coward Whig! If mankind had wished for what is right, they might have had it long ago. The theory is plain enough; but they are prone to mischief, 'to every good work reprobate.' I have seen all that had been done by the mighty yearnings of the spirit and intellect of men, 'of whom the world was not worthy,' and that promised a proud opening to truth and good through the vista of future years, undone by one man, with just glimmering of

³⁰ Haydon's *Correspondence and Table Talk*, II, 32.

understanding enough to feel that he was a king, but not to comprehend how he could be king of a free people! I have seen this triumph celebrated by poets, the friends of my youth and the friends of man, but who were carried away by the infuriate tide that, setting in from a throne, bore down every distinction of right reason before it; and I have seen all those who did not join in applauding this insult and outrage on humanity proscribed, hunted down (they and their friends made a bye-word of), so that it has become an understood thing that no one can live by his talents or knowledge who is not ready to prostitute those talents and that knowledge to betray his species, and prey upon his fellow-man. . . . In private life do we not see hypocrisy, servility, selfishness, folly, and impudence succeed, while modesty shrinks from the encounter, and merit is trodden under foot? How often is 'the rose plucked from the forehead of a virtuous love to plant a blister there!' What chance is there of the success of real passion? What certainty of its continuance? Seeing all this as I do, and unravelling the web of human life into its various threads of meanness, spite, cowardice, want of feeling, and want of understanding, of indifference towards others and ignorance of ourselves—seeing custom prevail over all excellence, itself giving way to infamy—mistaken as I have been in my public and private hopes, calculating others from myself, and calculating wrong; always disappointed where I placed most reliance; the dupe of friendship, and the fool of love; have I not reason to hate and to despise myself? Indeed I do; and chiefly for not having hated and despised the world enough."¹—This is not exactly downright cynicism; it is more like disappointment, beating its head frantically against the wall of circumstance. Yet through his bitterest utterances there is felt the warm senti-

¹ *Plain Speaker.*

ment that, "let people rail at virtue, at genius and friendship as long as they will—the very *names* of these disputed qualities are better than anything else that could be substituted for them, and embalm even the most angry abuse of them." ²²

It is no wonder that Hazlitt has never been a popular favorite. With a stronger attachment to principles than to persons, lavishing upon ideas or the fanciful creations of art a passionate affection which he grudgingly withheld from human beings, stubbornly tenacious of a set of political dogmas to which he was ready to sacrifice his dearest friends, morbidly sensitive to the faintest suggestion of a personal slight, and prompter than the serpent to vent against the aggressor the bitterness of his poison, he plays the role of Ishmael among the men of letters in his day. The violence of his retorts when he felt himself injured and his capacity for giving offence even when he was not directly provoked, begot a resentment in his adversaries which blinded them to an appreciation of his genuine worth. At best they might have assented, after his death, to the sublime pity with which Carlyle, from his spiritual altitudes, moralized upon his struggles. "How many a poor Hazlitt must wander on God's verdant earth, like the Unblest on burning deserts; passionately dig wells, and draw up only the dry quicksand; believe that he is seeking Truth, yet only wrestle among endless Sophisms, doing desperate battle as with spectre-hosts; and die and make no sign!" ²³ We must appeal to the issue to determine whether Hazlitt's battle was altogether against spectre-hosts, and whether in his quest for truth and beauty he has drawn up nothing but quicksand. But at least Carlyle's expression recognizes

²² *Characteristics*, CCCVII.

²³ "Characteristics," in Carlyle's *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (Chapman and Hall, 1898), III, 32.

the earnestness of his purpose and the bravery with which he maintained the conflict.

V Hazlitt gave himself freely and without reserve to his reader. By his side Leigh Hunt appears affected, De Quincey theatrical, Lamb—let us say discreet. Affectation and discretion were equally alien to Hazlitt's nature, as they concerned either his personal conduct or his literary exercises. In regard to every impression, every prejudice, every stray thought that struggled into consciousness, his practice was, to use his own favorite quotation,

"To pour out all as plain
As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne."

He has drifted far from the tradition of Addison and Steele with which his contemporaries sought to associate him. There was nothing in him of the courtier-like grace employed in the good-humored reproof of unimportant vices, of the indulgent, condescending admonition to the "gentle reader," particularly of the fair sex. In Hazlitt's hands the essay was an instrument for the expression of serious thought and virile passion. He lacked indeed the temperamental balance of Lamb. His insight into human nature was intellectual rather than sympathetic. Though as a philosopher he understood that the web of life is of a mingled yarn, he has given us none of those rare glimpses of laughter ending in tears or of tears subsiding in a tender smile which are the sources of Lamb's depth and his charm. The same thing is true of his humor. He relished heartily its appearance in others and had a most wholesome laugh; but in himself there is no real merriment, only an ironic realization of the contrasts of life. When he writes, the smile which sometimes seeks to overpower the grim fixity of his features, is frozen before it can emerge to the surface. He lacks all the ingratiating arts which make a

writer beloved. But if one enjoys a keen student of the intricacies of character, a bold and candid critic of human imperfections, a stimulating companion full of original ideas and deep feelings, he will find in Hazlitt an inexhaustible source of instruction and delight. Hazlitt has long appealed to men of vigorous character and acute intellect, men like Landor, Froude, Walter Bagehot, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Ernest Henley, who have either proclaimed his praise or flattered him with imitation. By the friend who knew him longest and was better qualified than any other to speak of him, he has been pronounced as "in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing."²⁴

II

THE discovery in the seventeenth century of the Greek treatise "On the Sublime," attributed to Longinus, with its inspired appreciation of the great passages in Greek literature so different from the analytic manner of Aristotle, gave a decided impulse to English criticism. It was at the same time that English prose, under the influence of French models, was developing a more familiar tone than it had hitherto been acquainted with. The union of the enthusiasm of Longinus with this moderated French prose resulted in the graceful prefaces of Dryden, which remained unmatched for more than a century. The Longinian fire, breathed upon too by the genius of Shakespeare, preserved the eighteenth century from congealing into the utter formalism of pseudo-Aristotelian authority. Though they did not produce an even warmth over the whole surface, the flames are observed darting through the crust even where the crust seems thickest. It is significant that Dr.

²⁴ "Letter of Elia to Robert Southey," Lamb's Works, ed. Lucas, I, 233.

Johnson should exclaim with admiration at the criticism of Dryden, not because Dryden judged according to rules but because his was the criticism of a poet. And he singles out as the best example of such criticism the well-known appreciation of Shakespeare, the very passage which Hazlitt later quoted as "the best character of Shakespeare that has ever been written."³⁵ The high-priest of classicism wavered frequently in his allegiance to some of the sacred fetishes of his cult, and had enough grace, once at least, to speak with scorn of the "cant of those who judged by principles rather than by perception."³⁶

- ✓ But to judge by perception is a comparatively rare accomplishment, and so most critics continued to employ the foot-rule as if they were measuring flat surfaces, while occasionally going so far as to recognize the existence of certain mountain-peaks as "irregular beauties." In a more or less conscious distinction from the criticism of external rules there developed also during the eighteenth century what its representatives were pleased to call metaphysical criticism, to which we should now probably apply the term psychological. This consisted in explaining poetic effects by reference to strictly mental processes in a tone of calm analysis eminently suited to the rationalistic temper of the age. It methodically traced the sources of grandeur or of pathos or of humor, and then illustrated its generalization by the practice of the poets. It could thereby pride itself on going back of the rules to the fundamental laws of human nature. Kames's *Elements of Criticism*, written in 1761, became a work of standard reference, though it
- did not impose on the great critics. In commending it Dr. Johnson was careful to remark, "I do not mean that he has taught us anything; but he has told us old things

³⁵ "On Criticism," in *Table Talk*.

³⁶ *Life of Pope, Johnson's Lives*, ed. Birkbeck Hill, IV, 248.

in a new way.”³⁷ But in general Kames was considered a safer guide than the enthusiastic Longinus, who throughout the century was looked upon with distrust. “Instead of shewing for what reason a sentiment or image is sublime, and discovering the secret power by which they affect a reader with pleasure, he is ever intent on producing something sublime *himself*, and strokes of his *own* eloquence.” So runs the complaint of Joseph Warton.³⁸ The distrust was not without ground. The danger that the method of Longinus in the hands of ungifted writers would become a cloak for critical ignorance and degenerate into empty bluster was already apparent.³⁹ Only rarely was there a reader who could distinguish between the false and the true application of the method. Gibbon did it in a passage which impressed itself upon the younger critics of Hazlitt’s generation. “I was acquainted only with two ways of criticising a beautiful passage: the one, to shew, by an exact anatomy of it, the distinct beauties of it, and whence they sprung; the other, an idle exclamation, or a general encomium, which leaves nothing behind it. Longinus has shewn me that there is a third. He tells me his own feelings upon reading it; and tells them with such energy, that he communicates them.”⁴⁰ That vital element, the commentator’s power of communicating his own feelings, constituting as it does the difference between phrase-making and valuable criticism, did not become prominent in English literature before the nineteenth century.

The official criticism of the early nineteenth century as represented by the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews, de-

³⁷ Boswell’s Johnson, ed. Birkbeck Hill, II, 89.

³⁸ *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, I, 170.

³⁹ See an essay by John Foster on “Poetical Criticism,” in *Critical Essays*, ed. Bohn, I, 144.

⁴⁰ Gibbon’s Journal, October 3, 1762. *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. 1814, V, 263.

rives its descent directly from the eighteenth. Whatever the Government might have thought of the politics of the Edinburgh, its literary outlook remained unexceptionably orthodox. Jeffrey's "Essay on Beauty" is a direct copy of Alison's "Essay on Taste." Much as Dr. Johnson in the preceding age, Jeffrey prided himself on the moral tendency of his criticism—a morality which consisted in censuring the life of Burns and in exalting the virtuous insipidities of Maria Edgeworth's tales as it might have been done by any faithful minister of the gospel. To be sure he cannot be said to have held tenaciously to the old set of canons. Though he stanchly withstood the new-fangled poetic practices of Wordsworth and of Southey, he bowed before the great popularity of Scott and Byron, even at the cost of some of his favorite maxims. In his writings the solvents of the older criticism are best seen at work. Jeffrey both by instinct and training was a lawyer, and his position at the head of the most respected periodical formed a natural temptation to a dictatorial manner. He was a judge who tried to uphold the literary constitution but wavered in the face of a strong popular opposition. When the support of precedent failed him, he remained without any firm conviction of his own. While his poetic taste was quite adequate to the appreciation of a Samuel Rogers or a Barry Cornwall, it was incomparably futile in the perception of a Wordsworth or a Shelley. In a passage composed at the end of his long editorial career in 1829, he unconsciously announced his own extinction as a critic:

"Since the beginning of our critical career, we have seen a vast deal of beautiful poetry pass into oblivion, in spite of our feeble efforts to recall or retain it in remembrance. The tuneful quartos of Southey are already little better than lumber:—and the rich melodies of Keats and

Shelley,—and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth,—and the plebeian pathos of Crabbe, are melting fast from the field of our vision. The novels of Scott have put out his poetry. Even the splendid strains of Moore are fading into distance and dimness, except where they have been married to immortal music; and the blazing star of Byron himself is receding from its place of pride. We need say nothing of Milman, and Croly, and Atherstone, and Hood, and a legion of others, who, with no ordinary gifts of taste and fancy, have not so properly survived their fame, as been excluded by some hard fatality, from what seemed their just inheritance. The two who have the longest withstood this rapid withering of the laurel, and with the least marks of decay on their branches, are Rogers and Campbell; neither of them, it may be remarked, voluminous writers, and both distinguished rather for the fine taste and consummate elegance of their writings, than for that fiery passion, and disdainful vehemence, which seemed for a time to be so much more in favour with the public.”⁴¹

But the authority of Jeffrey did not long remain unchallenged. His unfortunate “This will never do” became a by-word among the younger writers who were gradually awaking to the realization of a new spirit in criticism. The protest against the methods of the dictatorial quarterlies found expression in the two brilliant monthly periodicals, *Blackwood's* and the *London Magazine*, founded respectively in 1817 and 1820. In these no opportunity was neglected to thrust at the inflated pretensions of the established reviews, and, though the animus of rivalry might be suspected of playing its part, the blows usually struck home. There is an air of absolute finality about Lockhart's “Remarks on the Periodical Criticism of

⁴¹ Review of Mrs. Hemans's Poems, *Edinburgh Review*, October, 1829. Jeffrey's Works, III, 296.

England," and his characterization of Jeffrey in this article is a bold anticipation of the judgment of posterity.⁴² The editor of the *London Magazine* ⁴³ writes with equal assurance, "We must protest against considering the present taste as the standard of excellence, or the criticisms on poetry in the *Edinburgh Review* as the voice even of the present taste." The test of critical eligibility in this age is an appreciation of Wordsworth and a proper understanding of Coleridge his prophet, and it is by virtue of what inspiration they drew from these oracles that John Lockhart and John Scott became better qualified than Jeffrey or Gifford to form the literary opinions of the public.

✓ Coleridge more than any other person was responsible for bringing about a change in the attitude of literature toward criticism. As Hazlitt puts it with his inimitable vividness, he "threw a great stone into the standing pool of criticism, which splashed some persons with the mud, but which gave a motion to the surface and a reverberation to the neighbouring echoes, which has not since subsided."⁴⁴ Whether his ideas were borrowed from the Germans or evolved in his own brain, their importance for English literature remains the same. Coleridge's service lay in asserting and reasserting such fundamental principles as
✓ that a critical standard is something quite distinct from a set of external rules; that the traditional opposition between genius and laws was based on a misconception as to the function of the critic; that all great genius necessarily
✓ worked in accordance with certain laws which it was the function of the critic to determine by a study of each particular work of art; that art, being vital and organic,
" assumed different shapes at different epochs of human cul-

⁴² *Blackwood's Magazine*, II, 670-79.

⁴³ I, 281 (March, 1820).

⁴⁴ *Spirit of the Age*, "William Godwin."

ture; that only the spirit of poetry remained constant, while its form was molded anew by each age in accordance with the demands of its own life; that it was no more reasonable to judge Shakespeare's plays by the practice of Sophocles than to judge sculpture by the rules of painting. "O! few have there been among critics, who have followed with the eye of their imagination the imperishable yet ever wandering spirit of poetry through its various metempsychoses; or who have rejoiced with the light of clear perception at beholding with each new birth, with each rare *avatar*, the human race frame to itself a new body, by assimilating materials of nourishment out of its new circumstances, and work for itself new organs of power appropriate to the new sphere of its motion and activity."⁴⁵ This rare grasp of general principles was combined in Coleridge with poetic vision and a declamatory eloquence which enabled him to seize on the more ardent and open-minded men of letters and to determine their critical viewpoint.

William Hazlitt was among the earliest to fall under Coleridge's spell. Just how much he owed to Coleridge beyond the initial impulse it is impossible to prove, because so much of the latter's criticism was expressed during improvised monologues at the informal meetings of friends, or in lectures of which only fragmentary notes remain. At any rate, while Coleridge's chief distinction lay in the enunciation of general principles, Hazlitt's practice, in so far as it took account of these general principles at all, assumed their existence, and displayed its strength in concrete judgments of individual literary works. His criticism may be said to imply at every step the existence of Coleridge's, or to rise like an elegant superstructure on the solid foundation which the other had laid. Hazlitt communi-

⁴⁵ Works, ed. Shedd, IV, 35.

cated to the general public that love and appreciation of great literature which Coleridge inspired only in the few elect. The latter, even more distinctly than a poet for poets, was a *critic for critics*,⁴⁶ and three generations have not succeeded in absorbing all his doctrines. But Hazlitt, with a delicate sensitiveness to the impressions of genius, with a boundless zest of poetic enjoyment, with a firm common sense to control his taste, and with a gift of original expression unequalled in his day, arrested the attention of the ordinary reader and made effective the principles which Coleridge with some vagueness had projected. To analyze in cold blood such living criticism as Hazlitt's may expose one to unflattering imputations, but the attempt may serve to bring to light what is so often overlooked, that Hazlitt's criticism is no random, irresponsible discharge of his sensibilities, but has an implicit basis of sound theory.

In his *History of Criticism*, Mr. Saintsbury takes as his motto for the section on the early nineteenth century a sentence from Sainte-Beuve to the effect that nearly the whole art of the critic consists in knowing how to read a book with judgment and without ceasing to relish it.⁴⁷ We are almost ready to believe that the French critic, in the significant choice of the words judgment and relish, is consciously summarizing the method of Hazlitt, the more so as he elsewhere explicitly confesses a sympathy with the English critic.⁴⁸ Hazlitt has indeed himself characterized his art in some such terms. In one of his lectures he modestly describes his undertaking "merely to read over a set of authors with the audience, as I would do with

⁴⁶ Mr. Saintsbury has applied this phrase to Hazlitt himself, but we prefer to transfer the honor.

⁴⁷ "Savoir bien lire un livre en le jugeant chemin faisant, et sans cesser de le goûter, c'est presque tout l'art du critique." *Chateaubriand et son Groupe Littéraire*. I, 234.

⁴⁸ *Portraits Contemporains*, "Sonnet d'Hazlitt," II, 515.

a friend, to point out a favorite passage, to explain an objection; or if a remark or a theory occurs, to state it in illustration of the subject, but neither to tire him nor puzzle myself with pedantical rules and pragmatistical *formulas* of criticism that can do no good to anybody." ⁴⁹ This sounds dangerously like dilettantism. It suggests the method of what in our day is called impressionism, one of the most delightful forms of literary entertainment when practiced by a master of literature. The impressionist's aim is to record whatever impinges on his brain, and though with a writer of fine discernment it is sure to be productive of exquisite results, as criticism it is undermined by the impressionist's assumption that every appreciation is made valid by the very fact of its existence. But this was scarcely Hazlitt's idea of criticism. Against universal suffrage in matters literary he would have been among the first to protest. We might almost imagine we were listening to some orthodox theorist of the eighteenth century when we hear him declaring that the object of taste "must be that, not which *does*, but which *would* please universally, supposing all men to have paid an equal attention to any subject and to have an equal relish for it, which can only be guessed at by the imperfect and yet more than casual agreement among those who have done so from choice and feeling." ⁵⁰ Though not the surest kind of clue, this indicates at least that Hazlitt's rejection of "pedantical rules and pragmatistical formulas" was not equivalent to a declaration of anarchy.

For Hazlitt the assertion of individual taste meant emancipation from arbitrary codes and an opportunity to embrace a compass as wide as the range of literary excellence. Realizing that every reader, even the professed critic, is

⁴⁹ *Age of Elizabeth*, "On Miscellaneous Poems," V, 301.

⁵⁰ "Thoughts on Taste," XI, 460.

hemmed in by certain prejudices arising from his temperament, his education, his environment, he was unwilling to pledge his trust to any school or fashion of criticism. The favorite oppositions of his generation—Shakespeare and Pope, Fielding and Richardson, English poetry and French—had no meaning for him. He was glad to enjoy each in its kind. “The language of taste and moderation is, *I prefer this, because it is best to me*; the language of dogmatism and intolerance is, *Because I prefer it, it is best in itself, and I will allow no one else to be of a different opinion.*”⁵¹ This passage, in connection with the one last quoted, may be considered as fixing the limits within which Hazlitt gave scope to personal preference. The sum of
 v his literary judgments reveals a taste for a greater variety of the works of genius than is displayed by any contemporary, and the absence of “a catholic and many-sided sympathy”⁵² is one of the last imputations that should have been brought against him. His criticism has limita-
 v tions, but not such as are due to a narrowness of literary perception.

Even Hazlitt’s shortcomings may frequently be turned to his glory as a critic. The most remarkable thing about his violent political prejudices is the success with which he dissociated his literary estimates from them. Such a serious
 v limitation in a critic as deficiency of reading in his case only raises our astonishment at the sureness of instinct which enabled him to pronounce unerringly on the scantest information. Never was there a critic of nearly equal pre-
 v tensions who had as little of the scholar’s equipment. If, as he tells us, he applied himself too closely to his studies at a certain period in his youth,⁵³ he atoned for it by his

⁵¹ *Conversations of Northcote*, VI, 457.

⁵² Cf. Herford: *Age of Wordsworth*, p. 51.

⁵³ “On the Conduct of Life,” XII, 427.

neglect of books in later life.⁵⁴ A desultory education had left him without that intimacy with the classics which belonged of right to every cultivated Englishman. His allusions to the Greek and Latin writers are in the most general terms, but with a note of reverence which did not enter into his speech concerning even Shakespeare. "I would have you learn Latin (he is writing to his son) because there is an atmosphere round this sort of classical ground, to which that of actual life is gross and vulgar."⁵⁵ His knowledge of Italian was no more thorough, though here he was more nearly on a level with his contemporaries. For Boccaccio indeed he showed an intense affection, and he could write intelligently, if not deeply, concerning Dante and Ariosto and Tasso.⁵⁶ With French he naturally had a wider acquaintance, but still nothing beyond the reach of the very general reader. The notable point is that he refrains from passing judgment on the entire body of French poetry because it is unlike English poetry. He is not infected with the wilful provincialism of Lamb nor with the spirit of John Bullishness which seriously proclaims in its rivals "equally a want of books and men."⁵⁷ "We may be sure of this," says Hazlitt, "that when we see nothing but grossness and barbarism, or insipidity and verbiage in a writer that is the God of a nation's idolatry, it is we and not they who want true taste and feeling."⁵⁸ Having this wholesome counsel ever before him, he can be more generously appreciative of the genius of Molière, more justly discerning in his analysis of the spirit of

⁵⁴ Patmore: *My Friends and Acquaintances*, III, 122.

⁵⁵ "On the Conduct of Life," XII, 428. See also the paper "On the Study of the Classics," in the *Round Table*.

⁵⁶ See a note to p. 329.

⁵⁷ See Wordsworth's sonnet, "Great men have been among us."

⁵⁸ "On Criticism," in *Table Talk*.

Rousseau,⁵⁹ and more free of the puritanical clatter against Voltaire than any of his fellow-critics. With German literature his familiarity was bounded on the one hand by Schiller's "Robbers," on the other by the first part of "Faust," the entire gap between these being filled by the popular versions of Kotzebue's plays and Mme. de Staël's book on Germany. Yet he dared to write a character of the German people which is almost worth quoting.⁶⁰

- ✓ In English his range of reading was correspondingly narrow. Such a piece of waywardness as his enthusiasm for John Bunce,⁶¹ derived no doubt from Lamb, is unique. Broadly speaking, he prefers to accept the established canon and approaches new discoveries with a deep distrust. He is very little concerned with writers of the
- ✓ second order, and in his Lecture on the Living Poets he shocked his audience unspeakably, when he came to the name of Hannah More, by merely remarking, "She has written a great deal which I have never read." He looked upon most living writers through the eyes of the somewhat jaded reviewer, who, though susceptible to a romantic thrill from one or the other, is usually on his guard against spurious blandishments and reluctant to admit the claims of new pretenders. Even in poets of the first rank he slurred over a great deal; but what he loved he dwelt on with a kind of rapt inspiration until it became his second nature, its spirit and its language fused intimately with his own.

⁵⁹ "He is the most illuminating and the most thoughtful of all Rousseau's early English critics. . . . His essay 'On the Character of Rousseau' was not surpassed, or approached, as a study of the great writer until the appearance of Lord Morley's monograph nearly sixty years afterwards." E. Gosse: *Fortnightly Review*, July, 1912, p. 30.

⁶⁰ In the review of Schlegel's *Lectures on the Drama*, Works, X, 78.

⁶¹ See the paper on "John Bunce," in the *Round Table*.

This revolutionist in politics was a jealous aristocrat in the domains of art, and this admission does not impair our earlier assertion of his openness to a greater variety of impressions than any of his contemporaries in criticism.

Hazlitt's professed indifference to system is probably due as much to lack of deep reading as to romantic impatience of restraint. When he declared that it was beyond his powers "to condense and combine all the facts relating to a subject"⁶² or that "he had no head for arrangement,"⁶³ it was only because he did not happen to be a master of the facts which required combination or arrangement. For he did have an unusual gift for penetrating to the core of a subject and tearing out the heart of its mystery; in fact, his power of concrete literary generalization was in his age unmatched. To reveal the distinctive virtue of a literary form, to characterize the sources of weakness or of strength in a new or a by-gone fashion of poetry, to analyze accurately the forces impelling a whole mighty age—these things, requiring a deep and steady concentration of mind, are among his most solid achievements. In a paragraph he distils for us the essence of what is picturesque and worth dwelling on in the comedy of the Restoration. In a page he triumphantly establishes the boundary-line between the poetry of art and nature—Pope and Shakespeare—which to the present day remains as a clear guide, while at the same time Campbell and Byron and Bowles are filling the periodicals with protracted and often irrelevant arguments on one side or the other which only the critically curious now venture to look into. In the space of a single lecture he takes a sweeping view of all the great movements which gave vitality and grandeur to the Elizabethan spirit and found a voice in its literature, so that in spite of his little

⁶² *Correspondence of Macvey Napier*, p. 21.

⁶³ "On the Pleasure of Painting," in *Table Talk*.

learning he seems to have left nothing for his followers but to fill in his outline. The same keenness of discernment ✓ he applied casually in dissecting the genius of his own time. He associated the absence of drama with the French Revolution, its tendency to deal in abstractions and to regard everything in relation to *man* and not men—a tendency irreconcilable with dramatic literature, which is essentially individual and concrete.⁶⁴ To be sure the eighteenth century before the Revolution was as void of drama as Hazlitt's generation, but what is true of the period which produced Political Justice and the Edinburgh Review would hold equally of the time which produced the "Essay on Man" and the deistic controversy. He sometimes harshly exposes the weaker side of contemporary lyricism as a "mere effusion of natural sensibility," and he regrets the absence of "imaginary splendor and human passion" as of a glory departed.⁶⁵ But with all this he had the true historical sense. It breaks out most unmistakably when he ✓ says, "If literature in our day has taken this decided turn into a critical channel, is it not a presumptive proof that it ought to do so?"⁶⁶ Of the actual application of historical principles, which were just beginning to be realized in the study of literature, we find only a few faint traces in Hazlitt. Some remarks on the influence of climate and of religious and political institutions occur in his contributions to the Edinburgh, but occasionally their perfunctory manner suggests the editorial pen of Jeffrey. Doubtless Hazlitt's discriminating judgment would have enabled him to excel in this field, had he been equipped with the necessary learning.

It may also be a serious limitation of Hazlitt's that he

⁶⁴ *Dramatic Essays*, VIII, 415.

⁶⁵ "On Shakespeare. and Milton," p. 44.

⁶⁶ "The Periodical Press," X, 203.

neglects questions of structure and design. Doubtless he was reacting against the jargon of the older criticism with its lifeless and monotonous repetitions about invention and fable and unity, giving nothing but the "superficial plan and elevation, as if a poem were a piece of formal architecture."⁶⁴ In avoiding the study of the design of "Paradise Lost" or of the "Faerie Queene" he may have brought his criticism nearer to the popular taste; but he deliberately shut himself off from a vision of some of the higher reaches of poetic art, perhaps betraying thereby that lack of "imagination" with which he has sometimes been charged.⁶⁵ His interpretation of an author is therefore occasionally in danger of becoming an appreciation of isolated characters, or scenes, or passages, as if he were actually reading him over with his audience. But this is a limitation which Hazlitt shares with all the finer critics of his day.

After all these shortcomings have been acknowledged, the permanence of Hazlitt's achievement appears only the more remarkable. It is clear that the gods made him critical. The two essential qualities of judgment and taste he seems to have possessed from the very beginning. It is impossible to trace in him any development of taste; his growth is but the succession of his literary experiences. One looks in vain for any of those errors of youth such as are met even in a Coleridge enamored of Bowles. What extravagance of tone Hazlitt displayed in his early criticism he carried with him to his last day. If any change is to be noted, it is in the growing keenness of his appreciation. The early maturity of his judicial powers is attested by the political and metaphysical tendency of his youthful

⁶⁴ "On Criticism," in *Table Talk*.

⁶⁵ Cf. "On Reading Old Books," pp. 338-9, where this charge is curiously echoed by Hazlitt himself.

studies. His birth as a full-fledged critic awaited only the stirring of the springs of his eloquence, as is evident from the excellence of what is practically his first literary essay, the "Character of Burke."

No critic has approached books with so intense a passion as Hazlitt. That sentimental fondness for the volumes themselves, especially when enriched by the fragrance of antiquity, which gives so delicious a savor to the bookishness of Lamb, was in him conspicuously absent. For him books were only a more vivid aspect of life itself. "Tom Jones," he tells us, was the novel that first broke the spell of his daily tasks and made of the world "a dance through life, a perpetual gala-day."⁶⁹ Keats could not have romped through the "Faerie Queene" with more spirit than did Hazlitt through the length and breadth of eighteenth century romance, and the young poet's awe before the majesty of Homer was hardly greater than that of the future critic when a Milton or a Wordsworth swam into his ken. This hot and eager interest, deprived of its outlet in the form of direct emulation, sought a vent in communicating itself to others and in making converts to its faith. So intimately ✓ did Hazlitt feel the spell of a work of genius, that its life-blood was transfused into his own almost against his will. "I wish," he exclaims, "I had never read the *Emilius* . . . I had better have formed myself on the model of Sir Fopling Flutter."⁷⁰ He entered into the poet's creation with a sympathy amounting almost to poetic vision, and the ever-present sense of the reality of the artist's world led him to interpret literature primarily in relation to life. The poetry of character and passion is what he regards of most essential interest.⁷¹ This point of view unintentionally converts his familiar essays on life into a literary dis-

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁷¹ "On Shakespeare and Milton," p. 109.

course, and gives to his formal criticism the tone of a study of life at its sources, raising it at once to the same level with creative literature. Though he nowhere employs the now familiar formula of "literature and life," the lecture "On Poetry in General" is largely an exposition of this outlook.

Life in its entire compass is regarded as the rough material of literature, but it does not become literature until the artist's imagination, as with a divine ray, has penetrated the mass and inspired it with an ideal existence. Among the numerous attempts of his contemporaries to define the creative faculty of the poet, this comparatively simple one of Hazlitt's is worth noting. "This intuitive perception of the hidden analogies of things, or, as it may be called, this *instinct of imagination*, is perhaps what stamps the character of genius on the productions of art more than any other circumstance: for it works unconsciously, like nature, and receives its impressions from a kind of inspiration."¹² It is this power that he has in mind when he says "Poetry is infusing the same spirit in a number of things, or bathing them all as it were, in the same overflowing sense of delight."¹³ It shows Hazlitt to have fully apprehended the guiding principle of the new ideal of criticism which, looking upon the work of art as an act of original creation and not of mechanical composition, based its judgment on a direct sympathy with the artist's mind instead of resorting to a general rule. In the light of this principle he is enabled to avoid the pitfalls of a moralistic interpretation of literature and to decide the question as to the relative importance of substance and treatment with a certainty which seems to preclude the possibility of any other answer.

¹² "The English Novelists," VIII, 109.

¹³ "Thoughts on Taste," XI, 463.

It is not the dignity of the theme which constitutes the great work of art, for in that case a prose summary of the "Divine Comedy" would be as exalted as the original, and it would be necessary merely to know the subject of a poem in order to pass judgment upon it. A low or a trivial subject may be raised by the imagination of the artist who recognizes in it the elements of beauty or power. No definition of poetry can be worth anything which would exclude "The Rape of the Lock"; and Murillo's painting of "The Two Beggar Boys" is as much worth having "as almost any picture in the world."⁷⁴ "Yet it is not true (that execution is everything, and the class or subject nothing. The highest subjects, equally well-executed (which, however, rarely happens), are the best."⁷⁵ Though each is perfect in its kind, there can be no difficulty in deciding the question of greatness between "King Lear" and "The Comedy of Errors." "The greatest strength of genius is shewn in describing the strongest passions: for the power of imagination, in works of invention, must be in proportion to the force of the natural impressions, which are the subject of them."⁷⁶ One also finds a test of relative values in the measure of fulness with which the work of art reflects the complex elements of life. If we estimate a tragedy of Shakespeare above one of Lillo or Moore, it is because "impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of the constitution, in order to be perfect."⁷⁷

In treating of the specific distinction of poetry Hazlitt

⁷⁴ "On Criticism," in *Table Talk*.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Characters of Shakespeare*, "Lear."

⁷⁷ "On Poetry in General," p. 258.

does not escape the usual difficulties. Taking his point of departure from Milton's "thoughts that voluntary move harmonious numbers," he defines poetry in a passage that satisfactorily anticipates the familiar one of Carlyle, as "the music of language answering to the music of the mind. . . . Wherever any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it, and brood over it, melting the heart in tenderness, or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm;—wherever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong or repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous, or gradually varied according to the occasion, to the sounds that express it—this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion."⁷⁸ In this mystical direction a definition could go no further, but like nearly all writers and speakers Hazlitt is inclined to use the word poetry in a variety of more or less connected meanings,⁷⁹ ordinarily legitimate enough, but somewhat embarrassing when it is a question of definition. "That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with indescribable longings, is," he says, "poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by 'being married to immortal verse.'"⁸⁰ If it is true that Pilgrim's Progress and Robinson Crusoe possess the "essence and the power of poetry"

⁷⁸ "On Poetry in General," p. 266.

⁷⁹ Hazlitt defends himself on the ground that "the word has these three *distinct* meanings in the English language, that is, it signifies the composition produced, the state of mind or faculty producing it, and, in certain cases, the subject-matter proper to call forth that state of mind." *Letter to Gifford*, I, 396.

⁸⁰ "On Poetry in General," pp. 268-9.

and require only the addition of verse to become absolutely so,⁸¹ then the musical expression is only a factitious ornament, to be added or removed at the caprice of the writer. But Hazlitt is careful to declare that verse does not make the whole difference between poetry and prose, leaving the whole question as vaguely suspended as ever.⁸²

Bare theorizing, according to his own confession, was ✓ no favorite pursuit with Hazlitt. He enjoyed himself much more in the analysis of an individual author or his work. His aversion to literary cant, his love of "saying things that are his own in a way of his own," were here most in evidence. What he says of Milton might appropriately be applied to himself, that he formed the most intense conception of things and then embodied them by a single stroke of his pen. In a phrase or in a sentence he stamped the character of an author indelibly, and, enemy to commonplace though he was, became a cause of commonplace in others. No matter how much might already have been written on a subject (and Hazlitt did not make a practice of celebrating neglected obscurity) his own view stood out fresh and clear, and yet his judgments were never eccentric. ✓ He wrestled with a writer's thoughts, absorbed his most passionate feelings, and mirrored back his most exquisite perceptions with "all the color, the light and the shade." His fertility is more amazing than his intensity, for no critic of nearly equal rank has enriched English literature with so many valuable and ✓ enduring judgments on so great a variety of subjects. Dr. Johnson is by common consent the spokesman of the eighteenth century, or of its dominant class; Coleridge and

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 268.

⁸² Those interested in the perennial discussion of the relation of poetry to verse or metre would do well to read the recent interesting contribution to the subject by Professor Mackail in his *Lectures on Poetry* (Longmans, 1912).

Lamb are entitled to the glory of revealing the literature between Spenser and Milton to English readers, and the former rendered the additional service of acting as the interpreter of Wordsworth. But to give an idea of Hazlitt's scope would require a summary of opinions embracing poetry from Chaucer and Spenser to Wordsworth and Byron, prose sacred and profane from Bacon and Jeremy Taylor to Burke and Edward Irving, the drama in its two flourishing periods, the familiar essay from Steele and Addison to Lamb and Leigh Hunt, the novel from Defoe to Sir Walter Scott. This does not begin to suggest Hazlitt's versatility. His own modest though somewhat over-alliterative words are that he has "at least glanced over a number of subjects—painting, poetry, prose, plays, politics, parliamentary speakers, metaphysical lore, books, men, and things."⁸³

The importance of Hazlitt's Shakespearian criticism is no longer open to question. Though Coleridge alluded to them slightly as out-and-out imitations of Lamb,⁸⁴ Hazlitt's dicta on the greatest English genius are equal in depth to Lamb's and far more numerous; and while in profoundness and subtlety they fall short of the remarks of Coleridge himself, they surpass them in intensity and carrying power. To both of these men Hazlitt owed a great deal in his appreciation of Shakespeare, and perhaps even more to August Wilhelm Schlegel, whose *Lectures on Dramatic Literature* he reviewed in 1815.⁸⁵ His allusions to Schlegel border on enthusiasm and he makes it a proud claim that he has done "more than any one except Schlegel to vindicate the Characters of Shakespeare's Plays

⁸³ "On the Causes of Popular Opinion," XII, 320.

⁸⁴ Coleridge: *Table Talk*, Aug. 6, 1832.

⁸⁵ *Edinburgh Review*, Feb., 1816. The nature of Hazlitt's debt to Coleridge, Lamb and Schlegel is to some extent illustrated in the notes to the present text.

from the stigma of French criticism."⁸⁶ But however great his obligation, there was some point in the compliment of the German critic when he declared that Hazlitt had gone beyond him (*l'avoit dépassé*) in his Shakespearian opinions.⁸⁷ A few years later Heine maintained that the only significant commentator of Shakespeare produced by England was William Hazlitt.⁸⁸ Coleridge's notes, it is to be remembered, were not at that time generally accessible.

Hazlitt's attitude toward Shakespeare was wholesomely on this side of idolatry. He did not make it an article of faith to admire everything that Shakespeare had written, and refused his praise to the poems and most of the sonnets. Even Schlegel and Coleridge could not persuade him to see beauties in what appeared to be blemishes, but in a general estimate of Shakespeare's all-embracing genius he conceived his faults to be "of just as much consequence as his bad spelling."⁸⁹ He saw in him a genius who comprehended all humanity, who represented it poetically in all its shades and varieties. He examined all the fine distinctions of character, he studied Shakespeare's manner of combining and contrasting them so as to produce a unity of tone above even the art of the classic unities. From the irresponsible comedy of Falstaff to the deepest tragic notes of Lear, the whole gamut of human emotions encounters responsive chords in the critic's mind—the young love of Romeo and Juliet or the voluptuous abandonment of Antony and Cleopatra, the intellect of Iago irresistibly impelled to malignant activity or Hamlet entangled in the coils of a fatal introspection. To the sheer poetry of

⁸⁶ "Whether Genius is Conscious of its Powers," in *Plain Speaker*.

⁸⁷ Moore's *Letters and Journals*, May 21, 1821, III, 235.

⁸⁸ *Shakespeare's Mädchen und Frauen*.

⁸⁹ Review of Schlegel's Lectures, Works, X, 111.

Shakespeare he is also acutely sensitive, to the soft moonlit atmosphere of the "Midsummernight's Dream," to the tender gloom of "Cymbeline," to the "philosophic poetry" of "As You Like It." Some of his interpretations of isolated passages are hardly to be surpassed. He comments minutely and exquisitely on what he considers to be a touchstone of poetic feeling,

"Daffodils
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty."**

And with what complete insight he translates a speech of Antony's:

- "This precarious state and the approaching dissolution of his greatness are strikingly displayed in the dialogue of Antony with Eros:

Antony. Eros, thou yet behold'st me?

Eros. Ay, noble lord.

Antony. Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish;
A vapour sometime, like a bear or lion,
A towered citadel, a pendant rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon't, that nod unto the world
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs,
They are black vesper's pageants.

Eros. Ay, my lord.

Antony. That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.

Eros. It does, my lord.

Antony. My good knave, Eros, now thy captain is
Even such a body,' etc.

"This is, without doubt, one of the finest pieces of poetry in Shakspeare. The splendour of the imagery, the semblance of reality, the lofty range of picturesque objects

** "Poetry," XII, 339.

hanging over the world, their evanescent nature, the total uncertainty of what is left behind, are just like the mouldering schemes of human greatness. It is finer than Cleopatra's passionate lamentation over his fallen grandeur, because it is more dim, unstable, unsubstantial." ⁸¹

If an understanding of Shakespeare in Hazlitt's day may be taken as a measure of a critic's depth of insight, his attitude toward Shakespeare's fellow-dramatists will just as surely reveal his powers of discrimination. Lamb was often carried away by a pioneer's fervor and misled persons like Lowell, who, returning to Ford late in life, found "that the greater part of what [he] once took on trust as precious was really paste and pinchbeck," and that as far as the celebrated closing scene in "The Broken Heart" was concerned, Charles Lamb's comment on it was "worth more than all Ford ever wrote." ⁸² Hazlitt's dispassionate sanity in this instance forms an instructive contrast: "Except the last scene of the Broken Heart (which I think extravagant—others may think it sublime, and be right) they [Ford's plays] are merely exercises of style and effusion of wire-drawn sentiment." ⁸³ The same strength of judgment rendered Hazlitt proof against the excessive sentimentality in Beaumont and Fletcher and gave a distinct value to his opinions even when they seemed to be wrong, which was not often. But in writing of Marlowe, of Dekker and of Webster, he spreads out all his sail to make a joyous run among the beauties in his course.

And it is so with the rest of his criticism—throughout the same susceptibility to all that is true, or lofty, or refined, vigilantly controlled by a firm common sense, the

⁸¹ *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, "Antony and Cleopatra."

⁸² Lowell: *Old English Dramatists*.

⁸³ *Lecture on the Age of Elizabeth*, "On Beaumont and Fletcher" V, 269.

same stamp of originality unmistakably impressed on all. "I like old opinions with new reasons," he once said to Northcote, "not new opinions without any."⁴⁴ But he did not hesitate to express a new opinion where the old one appeared to be unjust. His heretical preference of Steele over Addison has found more than one convert in later days. On Spenser or Pope, on Fielding or Richardson, he is equally happy and unimprovable. In the opinion of Mr. Saintsbury, Hazlitt's general lecture on Elizabethan literature, his treatment of the dramatists of the Restoration, of Pope, of the English Novelists, and of Cobbett have never been excelled; and who is better qualified than Mr. Saintsbury by width of reading to express such an opinion?⁴⁵

Of Hazlitt's treatment of his own contemporaries an additional word needs to be said. No charge has been repeated more often than that of the inconsistency, perversity, and utter unreliableness of his judgments on the writers of his day. To distinguish between the claims of living poets, particularly in an age of new ideas and changing forms, is a task which might test the powers of the most discerning critics, and in which perfection is hardly to be attained. Yet one may ask whether in the entire extent of Hazlitt's writing a great living genius has been turned into a mockery or a figurehead been set up for the admiration of posterity. Of his personal and political antipathies enough has been said, but against literary orthodoxy his only great sin is a harsh review of "Christabel."⁴⁶ If in general we look at the age through Hazlitt's eyes, we shall see its literature dominated by the figures,

⁴⁴ *Conversation of Northcote*, VI, 393.

⁴⁵ *Essays in English Literature*, Second Series, 159-161.

⁴⁶ There seems to be no reason for doubting Hazlitt's authorship of the article in the *Examiner*. See Works, XI, 580.

✓ of Wordsworth and Scott, the one regarded as the restorer of life to poetry, the other as the creator or transcriber of a whole world of romance and humanity. Coleridge stands out prominently as the widest intellect of his age. Byron's poetry bulks very large, though it is not estimated as superlatively as in the criticism of our own day. It is a pity that Hazlitt never wrote formally of Keats, for his casual allusions indicate a deep enjoyment of the "rich beauties and the dim obscurities" of the "Eve of St. Agnes"⁹⁷ and an appreciation of the perfection of the great odes.⁹⁸ If he failed to give Shelley his full dues, he did not overlook his exquisite lyrical inspiration. He spoke of Shelley as a man of genius, but "'all air,' disdaining the bars and ties of mortal mould;" he praised him for "single thoughts of great depth and force, single images of rare beauty, detached passages of extreme tenderness," and he rose to enthusiasm in commending his translations, especially the scenes from Faust.⁹⁹ He has been accused of writing a *Spirit of the Age* which omitted to give ✓ an account of Shelley and Keats, but in the title of the book consists his excuse. As it was not his idea to anticipate the decision of posterity but only to sketch the personalities ✓ who were in control of the public attention, he passed over the finer poets who were still neglected, and wrote instead about Campbell and Moore and Crabbe. It is sufficient praise for the critic that those of whom he has undertaken to treat stand irreversibly judged in his pages. He is generous toward Campbell and Moore, who were both personally hostile to him; he is scrupulously honest toward Bentham, with whose system he had no sympathy. The concluding pages of his sketch of Southey, in view of that

⁹⁷ "William Gifford," in *Spirit of the Age*.

⁹⁸ *Select British Poets*. See Works, V, 378.

⁹⁹ "Shelley's Posthumous Poems," Works, X, 256 ff.

poet's rancor against him, are almost defiant in their magnanimity. His adverse judgments, moreover, are as permanent as his favorable ones. He pronounced the verdict against the naked realism of Crabbe's poetry, which persons like Jeffrey thought superior to Wordsworth's, and he pricked the bubble of Edward Irving's popularity while it was at its pitch of highest glory. If he was often bitter toward men whom he at other times eulogized, it was in the heat and hurry of journalistic publication in a period when blows were freely dealt and freely taken. If he sometimes censured even Wordsworth and Scott and grew impatient with Byron and Coleridge, it must be remembered that these men of genius had imperfections, and that the imperfections of men of genius are of far greater concern to their contemporaries than to posterity. Time dispels the mists and allows the gross matter to settle to the bottom. We now have Wordsworth in the selections of Matthew Arnold, we read the Waverley Novels with Lockhart's Life of Scott before us, and we render praise to Coleridge for what he has accomplished since his death. With none of these advantages, Hazlitt's performance seems remarkable enough. No contemporary with the exception of Leigh Hunt displayed as wide a sympathy with the writers of that time, and Hazlitt so far surpasses Hunt in discrimination and strength, that he deserves to be called, strange as it may sound, the best contemporary judge of the literature of his age.

It has already been suggested that much of Hazlitt's appeal as a critic rests on the force of his popular eloquence, so that a brief consideration of his prose is not in this connection out of place. "We may all be fine fellows," said Stevenson, "but none of us can write like Hazlitt." To write a style that is easy yet incisive, lively and at the same time substantial, buoyant without being frothy, glit-

tering but with no tinsel frippery, a style combining the virtues of homeliness and picturesqueness, has been given to few mortals. Writing in a generation in which the standards of prose were conspicuously unsettled, when the most ambitious writers were seeking an escape from the frozen patterns of the eighteenth century in a restoration of the elaborate artifices of the seventeenth, when quaintness and ornateness were the evidence of a distinguished style, Hazlitt succeeded in preserving the note of familiarity without fading into colorlessness or in any degree effacing his individuality. He cannot be counted among the masters of finished prose, he is as a matter of fact often very negligent,¹⁰⁰ but he developed the best model of an undiluted, sturdy, popular style that is to be found in the English language.

Perhaps an adherence to the eighteenth century tradition of plainness is the most prominent characteristic of Hazlitt's prose. But his plainness is not precisely of the blunt type associated with Swift and Arbuthnot. It is modified by the Gallic tone of easy familiarity, by the ideal deemed appropriate for dignified converse among educated people of the world. His periods are of the simplest construction and they are not methodically combined in the artificial patterns beloved of the eighteenth century followers of the plain style. Not that he altogether neglects the devices of parallelism and antithesis when he wishes to give epigrammatic point to his remarks, but he more generally develops his ideas in a series of easily flowing sentences which are as near as writing can be to "the tone of lively and sensible

¹⁰⁰ Hazlitt's syntax is often abbreviated, elliptical, and unregardful of book rules. Constructions like the following are not uncommon in his prose: "As a novelist, his *Vicar of Wakefield* has charmed all Europe. . . . As a comic writer, his *Tony Lumpkin* draws forth new powers from Mr. Liston's face." *Lectures on the English Poets*, "On Swift, Young," etc., V, 119, 120.

conversation." It is impossible to match in the English essay such talk as Hazlitt reproduces in his accounts of the evenings at Lamb's room or of his meeting with Coleridge, in which high themes and spirited eloquence find spontaneous and unaffected expression through the same medium as might be employed in a deliberate definition of the nature of poetry. The various sets of lectures are pitched in the same conversational key and are found adequate to conveying a notion of the grandeur of Milton as well as of the familiarity of Lamb.

Those who have praised Hazlitt's simplicity have often given the impression that his prose is a single-stringed instrument, and have failed to suggest the range comprised between the simple hammer-strokes of the essay on Cobbett and the magnificent diapason in which he unrolls the panorama of Coleridge's mind. In both passages there is the same sentence-norm. In the first, the periods, not bound by any connecting words, strike distinctly, sharply, with staccato abruptness. The movement is that of a clean-limbed wrestler struggling with confident energy to pin down a difficult opponent:

"His principle is repulsion, his nature contradiction: he is made up of mere antipathies; an Ishmaelite indeed, without a fellow. He is always playing at *hunt-the-slipper* in politics. He turns round upon whoever is next to him. The way to wean him from any opinion, and make him conceive an intolerable hatred against it, would be to place somebody near him who was perpetually dinning it in his ears. When he is in England, he does nothing but abuse the Boroughmongers, and laugh at the whole system: when he is in America, he grows impatient of freedom and a republic. If he had staid there a little longer, he would have become a loyal and a loving subject of his Majesty King George IV. He lampooned the French Revolution

when it was hailed as the dawn of liberty by millions: by the time it was brought into almost universal ill-odour by some means or other (partly no doubt by himself) he had turned, with one or two or three others, staunch Bonapartist. He is always of the militant, not of the triumphant party: so far he bears a gallant show of magnanimity; but his gallantry is hardly of the right stamp: it wants principle. For though he is not servile or mercenary, he is the victim of self-will. He must pull down and pull in pieces: it is not in his disposition to do otherwise. It is a pity; for with his great talents he might do great things, if he would go right forward to any useful object, make thorough-stitch work of any question, or join hand and heart with any principle. He changes his opinions as he does his friends, and much on the same account. He has no comfort in fixed principles: as soon as anything is settled in his own mind, he quarrels with it. He has no satisfaction but in the chase after truth, runs a question down, worries and kills it, then quits it like vermin, and starts some new game, to lead him a new dance, and give him a fresh breathing through bog and brake, with the rabble yelping at his heels and the leaders perpetually at fault."¹⁰¹

In the other passage the clauses and phrases follow in their natural order, but they are united by the simplest kind of connective device in an undistinguishable stream over which the reader is driven with a steady swell and fall, sometimes made breathlessly rapid by the succession of its uniformly measured word-groups, but delicately modulated here and there to provide restful pauses in the long onward career:

"Next, he was engaged with Hartley's tribes of mind, 'etherial braid, thought-woven,'—and he busied himself for a year or two with vibrations and vibratiuncles and the

¹⁰¹ *Spirit of the Age*, "William Cobbett."

great law of association that binds all things in its mystic chain, and the doctrine of Necessity (the mild teacher of Charity) and the Millennium, anticipative of a life to come—and he plunged deep into the controversy on Matter and Spirit, and, as an escape from Dr. Priestley's Materialism, where he felt himself imprisoned by the logician's spell, like Ariel in the cloven pine-tree, he became suddenly enamoured of Bishop Berkeley's fairy-world, and used in all companies to build the universe, like a brave poetical fiction, of fine words—and he was deep-read in Malebranche, and in Cudworth's Intellectual System (a huge pile of learning, unwieldy, enormous) and in Lord Brook's hieroglyphic theories, and in Bishop Butler's Sermons, and in the Duchess of Newcastle's fantastic folios, and in Clarke and South and Tillotson, and all the fine thinkers and masculine reasoners of that age—and Leibnitz's *Pre-established Harmony* reared its arch above his head, like the rainbow in the cloud, covenanting with the hopes of man—and then he fell plump, ten thousand fathoms down (but his wings saved him harmless) into the *hortus siccus* of Dissent " etc.¹⁰²

The same style which glistens and sparkles in describing the fancy of Pope rises to an inspired chant with a clearly defined cadence at the recollection of the past glory of Coleridge:

" He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to

¹⁰² See pp. 210-213.

heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! That spell is broke; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more: but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound."¹⁰³

It would take much space to illustrate all the notes to which Hazlitt's voice responds—the pithy epigram of the *Characteristics*, the Chesterfieldian grace in his advice "On the Conduct of Life," the palpitating movement with which he gives expression to his keen enjoyment of his sensual or intellectual existence, and the subdued solemnity of his reveries which sometimes remind us that he was writing in an age which had rediscovered Sir Thomas Browne. The following sentence proves how accurately he could catch the rhythm of the seventeenth century. "That we should wear out by slow stages, and dwindle at last into nothing, is not wonderful, when even in our prime our strongest impressions leave little trace but for the moment, and we are the creatures of petty circumstance."¹⁰⁴ Other passages in the same essay echo this manner only less strikingly:

¹⁰³ "On the Living Poets," in *Lectures on the English Poets*, V, 167.

¹⁰⁴ This is the form of the passage as published in the *Literary Remains* (1836). That Hazlitt did not attain effects like this offhand, is evident from the comparative feebleness of the original sound of the passage in the *Monthly Magazine*: "That we should thus in a manner outlive ourselves, and dwindle imperceptibly into nothing, is not surprising, when even in our prime the strongest impressions leave so little traces of themselves behind, and the last object is driven out by the succeeding one." "On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth," *Works*, XII, 160.

"Life is indeed a strange gift, and its privileges are most mysterious. No wonder when it is first granted to us, that our gratitude, our admiration, and our delight, should prevent us from reflecting on our own nothingness, or from thinking it will ever be recalled. Our first and strongest impressions are borrowed from the mighty scene that is opened to us, and we unconsciously transfer its durability as well as its splendour to ourselves. So newly found we cannot think of parting with it yet, or at least put off that consideration *sine die*. Like a rustic at a fair, we are full of amazement and rapture, and have no thought of going home, or that it will soon be night. We know our existence only by ourselves, and confound our knowledge with the objects of it. We and nature are therefore one. Otherwise the illusion, the 'feast of reason and the flow of soul,' to which we are invited, is a mockery and a cruel insult. We do not go from a play till the last act is ended, and the lights are about to be extinguished. But the fairy face of nature still shines on: shall we be called away before the curtain falls, or ere we have scarce had a glimpse of what is going on? Like children, our step-mother nature holds us up to see the raree-show of the universe, and then, as if we were a burden to her to support, lets us fall down again. Yet what brave sublunary things does not this pageant present, like a ball or *fête* of the universe!"¹⁰⁵

In Hazlitt's vocabulary there is nothing striking unless it be the scrupulousness with which he avoids the danger of commonplaceness and of pedantry. It is easy to forget that the transparent obviousness of his style was attained only after many years of groping. We may well believe

¹⁰⁵ This passage also shows alterations from the first form. Cf. XII, 152.

that "there is a research in the choice of a plain, as well as of an ornamental or learned style; and, in fact, a great deal more."¹⁰⁶ Though he did not go in pursuit of the word to the extent of some later refiners of style, he had a clear realization that the appropriate word was what chiefly gave vitality to writing.¹⁰⁷ For this reason he constantly denounced Johnsonese with its polysyllabic Latin words which reduced language to abstract generalization. His own vocabulary is concrete and vivid, and of a purity which makes one wonder how even the Quarterly Review could have ventured to apply to him the epithet "slang-wanger."

In spite of all that may be said in honor of the unadorned style of composition, writers have ever found that even in prose ideas are most forcibly conveyed by means of imagery. Hazlitt, it should be remembered, was an ardent admirer of the picturesque qualities in the prose of Burke, the most brilliant of the eighteenth century. In recalling his first reading of Burke, he tells how he despaired of emulating his felicities. But whether by dint of meditating over Burke or by the native vigor of his fancy, Hazlitt learned to write as boldly and as brilliantly as the great orator. As a rule his rhetorical passages are not deliberately contrived, in the manner for example of

¹⁰⁶ *Lectures on the English Poets*. "On Swift, Young, etc.," V, 104. See also the paper in *Table Talk* on "Familiar Style."

¹⁰⁷ "I grant thus much, that it is in vain to seek for the word we want, or endeavour to get at it second-hand, or as a paraphrase on some other word—it must come of itself, or arise out of an immediate impression or lively intuition of the subject; that is, the proper word must be suggested immediately by the thoughts, but it need not be presented as soon as called for. . . . Proper expressions rise to the surface from the heat and fermentation of the mind, like bubbles on an agitated stream. It is this which produces a clear and sparkling style." "On Application to Study," in *Plain Speaker*.

his esteemed contemporary De Quincey. His tropes and images rise directly out of his subject or his feelings. Instead of dissecting the qualities of a character or a work of art, he translates its tone and its spirit as closely as language will permit. That is why his criticism, like Lamb's or that of the master of this form, Longinus, is itself first-rate literature, recreating the impression of a masterpiece and sometimes even going beyond it.

Of his picturesque quality examples enough may be found in the present volume, yet one cannot forbear to add a few illustrations at this point. There is his irresistible comparison of Cobbett in his political inconsistency to "a young and lusty bridegroom, that divorces a favorite speculation every morning, and marries a new one every night. He is not wedded to his notions, not he. He has not one Mrs. Cobbett among all his opinions."¹⁰⁸ There is a good deal more than mere wit in the analogy between Godwin's mechanical laboriousness and "an eight-day clock that must be wound up long before it can strike."¹⁰⁹ And there is real grandeur in his description of Fame: "Fame is the sound which the stream of high thoughts, carried down to future ages, makes as it flows—deep, distant, murmuring evermore like the waters of the mighty ocean. He who has ears truly touched to this music, is in a manner deaf to the voice of popularity."¹¹⁰ In representing the brilliant hues of Restoration comedy, he allows an even freer play to his fancy:

"In turning over the pages of the best comedies, we are almost transported to another world, and escape from this dull age to one that was all life, and whim, and mirth, and humour. The curtain rises, and a gayer scene presents

¹⁰⁸ *Spirit of the Age*. "Mr. Cobbett."

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, "William Godwin."

¹¹⁰ "On the Living Poets," *Lectures on English Poets*, V, 144.

itself, as on the canvas of Watteau. We are admitted behind the scenes like spectators at court, on a levee or birthday; but it is the court, the gala-day of wit and pleasure, of gallantry and Charles II.! What an air breathes from the name! what a rustling of silks and waving of plumes! what a sparkling of diamond ear-rings and shoe-buckles! What bright eyes, (Ah, those were Waller's Sacharissa's as she passed!) what killing looks and graceful motions! How the faces of the whole ring are dressed in smiles! how the repartee goes round! how wit and folly, elegance and awkward imitation of it, set one another off! Happy, thoughtless age, when kings and nobles led purely ornamental lives; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study went no farther than the choice of a sword-knot, or the adjustment of a side-curl; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing eloquence of dress; and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies, in giddy mazes, through the walks of St. James's Park!"¹¹¹

Sometimes, it is true, he allows his spirits to run away with his judgment, although in such instances the manner is so obviously exaggerated as to suggest deliberate mimicry. His account of the tawdry sentimentality of Moore's poetry sounds like pure travesty:

"His verse is like a shower of beauty; a dance of images; a stream of music; or like the spray of the water-fall, tinged by the morning-beam with rosy light. The characteristic distinction of our author's style is this continuous and incessant flow of voluptuous thoughts and shining allusions. He ought to write with a crystal pen on silver paper. His subject is set off by a dazzling veil of poetic diction, like a wreath of flowers gemmed with innumerable

¹¹¹ *Lectures on the Comic Writers*, "On Wycherley, Congreve, etc.," VIII, 70.

dew-drops, that weep, tremble, and glitter in liquid softness and pearly light, while the song of birds ravishes the ear, and languid odours breathe around, and Aurora opens Heaven's smiling portals, Peris and nymphs peep through the golden glades, and an Angel's wing glances over the glossy scene."¹¹²

One feature of Hazlitt's style concerning which much has been said both in praise and in blame is his inveterate use of quotations. His pages, particularly when he is in a contemplative mood, are sown with snatches from the great poets, and the effect generally is of the happiest. A line of Shakespeare's or of Wordsworth's, blending with a vein of high feeling or deep reflection, transfigures the entire passage as if by magic. Sometimes the phrase is merely woven into the general texture of the prose without in any way raising its tone, and on occasion some fine poetic expression is vulgarized by being thrown into very common company. It is vandalism to muster a sonnet of Shakespeare's into such a service and it in no way enhances the expressiveness of the passage to say, "A flashy pamphlet has been run to a five-and-thirtieth edition, and thus ensured the writer a 'deathless date' among political charlatans."¹¹³ The fact is that quotations were a part of Hazlitt's vocabulary, which he used with the same freedom as common locutions and with less scrupulous regard for the associations which were gathered about them. He negligently misquoted or wantonly adapted to his purpose, but the reader is willing to pardon the moments of irritation for the numerous delightful thrills which he has provoked by some happy poetic memory "stealing and giving odor" to a sentiment in itself dignified or elevated.

Hazlitt's influence as a critic may be inferred from a

¹¹² *Spirit of the Age*. "Mr. T. Moore," IV, 353.

¹¹³ *Table Talk*, "On Patronage and Puffing."

summary of his opinions. It was not so much through the infusion of a new spirit in literature that he acted on other minds. Though his criticism owes much of its value to the freshness and boldness of his approach, this temperamental virtue was not something which could be imitated by a less gifted writer. Sainte-Beuve indeed seems to recognize Hazlitt as the exponent of the impetuous and inspired vein in criticism—"the kind of inspiration which accompanies and follows those frequent articles dashingly improvised and launched under full steam. One puts himself completely into it: its value is exaggerated for the time being, its importance is measured by its fury, and if this leads to better results, there is no great harm after all."¹¹⁴ But though he professed these to be his own feelings as a critic, they were in him so modified by the traditional French moderation and suavity of tone, as well as by a greater precision of method, as to make the resemblance to Hazlitt inconspicuous. It is hard to determine to what extent Hazlitt's individualism is responsible for the lawless impressionism of some later critics,¹¹⁵ but it is not to be imputed to him as a sin if, in the course of a century, one of his virtues has become exaggerated into a fault. He has but suffered human destiny.

¹¹⁴ "L'espèce d'entrain qui accompagne et suit ces fréquents articles improvisés de verve et lancés à toute vapeur. On s'y met tout entier: on s'en exagère la valeur dans le moment même, on en mesure l'importance au bruit, et si cela mène à mieux faire, il n'y a pas grand mal après tout." *Portraits Contemporains*, II, 515.

¹¹⁵ "'Range and keenness of appreciation' do not by themselves give taste, but merely romantic gusto or perceptiveness. In order that gusto may be elevated to taste it needs to be disciplined and selective. To this end it must come under the control of an entirely different order of intuitions, of what I have called the 'back pull toward the centre.' The romantic one-sidedness that is already so manifest in Hazlitt's conception of taste has, I maintain, gone to seed in Professor Saintsbury." Irving Babbitt, in *Nation*, May 16, 1912.

Hazlitt's influence has been wide in guiding the taste of readers and in creating or giving currency to a body of opinions on literature which has found acceptance among critics. If the tributes of Schlegel and Heine to Hazlitt's Shakespearian criticism were insufficient, we have the word of his own countrymen for it that numberless readers were initiated into a proper understanding of Shakespeare by means of his writings.¹¹⁶ In our own days Mr. Howells has told us that Hazlitt "helped him to clarify and formulate his opinions of Shakespeare as no one else has yet done."¹¹⁷ Critics no less than readers owe him a large debt. Hazlitt had not been writing many years before his fellow-laborers in literature began to recognize and pay homage to his superior insight. His opinions were quoted as having the weight of authority by those who were friendly to him, the writers in the *London Magazine* or in the *Edinburgh Review*; they were appropriated without acknowledgement by the hostile contributors to *Blackwood's*. Many writers deferred to him as respectfully as he himself deferred to Coleridge and Lamb, even though Byron's respectable friends adjured the noble poet not to dignify Hazlitt in open controversy except by mentioning him as "a certain lecturer." Leigh Hunt was frequently indebted to him, but generally paid the tribute due. Macaulay sometimes assimilated a passage of Hazlitt's to the needs of his own earlier essays. In the essay on Milton his balancing of Charles's political vices against his domestic virtues is strikingly reminiscent of a similar treatment of Southey by the older critic. Personal dislike of Hazlitt, persisting after his death, for a long time prevented a proper respect being paid to his memory without much diminishing the weight of his influence. The attitude to-

¹¹⁶ T. N. Talfourd: *Edinburgh Review*, Nov., 1820.

¹¹⁷ *My Literary Passions*, 120.

ward him is summed up by a writer whose treatment in general does not err on the side of enthusiasm. Hazlitt, he tells us, is "a writer with whose reputation fashion has hitherto had very little to do—who is even now more read than praised, more imitated than extolled, and whose various productions still interest many who care and know very little about the author."¹¹⁸ But this very utterance was on the occasion of the turning of the tide. It was in a review of Hazlitt's *Literary Remains* which had been introduced by appreciative essays from the pens of Bulwer-Lytton and Thomas Noon Talfourd, the former not a little patronizing, but Talfourd's excellent in its discrimination of the strength and weakness of Hazlitt. A few years later came the implied compliment of Horne's *New Spirit of the Age*, which would hardly be worth mentioning were it not that Thackeray in reviewing it took occasion to pay an exquisite tribute to Hazlitt.¹¹⁹ From this time forth he was not wanting in stout champions, though most people still maintained a cautious reserve in their judgments of him. So sound and penetrating a critic as Walter Bagehot became an earnest convert, and in Bagehot's writings Mr. Birrell has pointed out more than one resemblance to Hazlitt. James Russell Lowell has not been profuse in his expressions of admiration, but he has probably followed Hazlitt's track more closely than any other important critic. Many of his essays seem to have been composed with a volume of Hazlitt on the desk before him. There is the essay on Pope with its general correspondence of points and occasional startling parallel of phrase. Hazlitt at the end of his lecture on Pope and Dryden remarks that poetry had "declined by successive gradations from the poetry of imagination in the age of Elizabeth to the poetry of

¹¹⁸ *Edinburgh Review*, January, 1837.

¹¹⁹ Thackeray's *Works*, ed. Trent and Henneman, XXV, 350-51.

fancy in the time of Charles I," and Lowell repeats this with some amplification. In the same connection he characterizes Shakespeare, Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton in the sharp epigrammatic manner reminding one of Hazlitt. In the concluding pages of the essay on Spenser we are also kept in a reminiscent mood, till Lowell tells us that "to read him is like dreaming awake," and at once there flashes upon us Hazlitt's expression that "Spenser is the poet of our waking dreams." It is through missionary work like this, not altogether conscious and therefore all the more genuine, that his opinions have been diffused through the length and breadth of English and been incorporated into the common stock. "Gracious rills from the Hazlitt watershed have flowed in all directions, fertilizing a dry and thirsty land"—is the happily turned phrase of Mr. Birrell. If in our own day there are still persons who, looking upon criticism as a severe science, occasionally sneer at him as a "facile eulogist,"¹²⁰ those who regard it rather as a gift have seen in him "the greatest critic that England has yet produced."¹²¹ Wherever the golden mean between these two extremes of opinion may lie, there is no doubt that for introducing readers to an appreciation of the great things in English literature, Hazlitt still remains without an equal.

¹²⁰ Robertson: *Essays Toward a Critical Method*. 81.

¹²¹ Saintsbury's *History of Criticism* and John Davidson's *Sentences and Paragraphs*, 113.

I

THE AGE OF ELIZABETH

THE age of Elizabeth was distinguished, beyond, perhaps, any other in our history, by a number of great men, famous in different ways, and whose names have come down to us with unblemished honours; statesmen, warriors, divines, scholars, poets, and philosophers, Raleigh, Drake, Coke, Hooker, and higher and more sounding still, and still more frequent in our mouths, Shakspeare, Spenser, Sidney, Bacon, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, men whom fame has eternised in her long and lasting scroll, and who, by their words and acts, were benefactors of their country, and ornaments of human nature. Their attainments of different kinds bore the same general stamp, and it was sterling: what they did, had the mark of their age and country upon it. Perhaps the genius of Great Britain (if I may so speak without offence or flattery), never shone out fuller or brighter, or looked more like itself, than at this period. Our writers and great men had something in them that savoured of the soil from which they grew: they were not French, they were not Dutch, or German, or Greek, or Latin; they were truly English. They did not look out of themselves to see what they should be; they sought for truth and nature, and found it in themselves. There was no tinsel, and but little art; they were not the spoiled children of affectation and refinement, but a bold, vigorous, independent race of thinkers, with prodigious strength and energy, with none but natural grace, and heartfelt unob-

trusive delicacy. They were not at all sophisticated. The mind of their country was great in them, and it prevailed. With their learning and unexampled acquirement, they did not forget that they were men: with all their endeavours after excellence, they did not lay aside the strong original bent and character of their minds. What they performed was chiefly nature's handy-work; and time has claimed it for his own.—To these, however, might be added others not less learned, nor with a scarce less happy vein, but less fortunate in the event, who, though as renowned in their day, have sunk into “mere oblivion,” and of whom the only record (but that the noblest) is to be found in their works. Their works and their names, “poor, poor dumb names,” are all that remains of such men as Webster, Deckar, Marston, Marlow, Chapman, Heywood, Middleton, and Rowley! “How lov'd, how honour'd once, avails them not:” though they were the friends and fellow-labourers of Shakspeare, sharing his fame and fortunes with him, the rivals of Jonson, and the masters of Beaumont and Fletcher's well-sung woes! They went out one by one unnoticed, like evening lights; or were swallowed up in the headlong torrent of puritanic zeal which succeeded, and swept away everything in its unsparing course, throwing up the wrecks of taste and genius at random, and at long fitful intervals, amidst the painted gew-gaws and foreign frippery of the reign of Charles II. and from which we are only now recovering the scattered fragments and broken images to erect a temple to true Fame! How long, before it will be completed?

If I can do anything to rescue some of these writers from hopeless obscurity, and to do them right, without prejudice to well-deserved reputation, I shall have succeeded in what I chiefly propose. I shall not attempt, indeed, to adjust the spelling, or restore the pointing, as if the

genius of poetry lay hid in errors of the press, but leaving these weightier matters of criticism to those who are more able and willing to bear the burden, try to bring out their real beauties to the eager sight, "draw the curtain of Time, and shew the picture of Genius," restraining my own admiration within reasonable bounds! . . .

We affect to wonder at Shakspeare, and one or two more of that period, as solitary instances upon record; whereas it is our own dearth of information that makes the waste; for there is no time more populous of intellect, or more prolific of intellectual wealth, than the one we are speaking of. Shakspeare did not look upon himself in this light, as a sort of monster of poetical genius, or on his contemporaries as "less than smallest dwarfs," when he speaks with true, not false modesty, of himself and them, and of his wayward thoughts, "desiring this man's art, and that man's scope." We fancy that there were no such men, that could either add to or take anything away from him, but such there were. He indeed overlooks and commands the admiration of posterity, but he does it from the *tableland* of the age in which he lived. He towered above his fellows, "in shape and gesture proudly eminent;" but he was one of a race of giants, the tallest, the strongest, the most graceful, and beautiful of them; but it was a common and a noble brood. He was not something sacred and aloof from the vulgar herd of men, but shook hands with nature and the circumstances of the time, and is distinguished from his immediate contemporaries, not in kind, but in degree and greater variety of excellence. He did not form a class or species by himself, but belonged to a class or species. His age was necessary to him; nor could he have been wrenched from his place in the edifice of which he was so conspicuous a part, without equal injury to himself and it. Mr. Wordsworth says of Milton, that "his soul

was like a star, and dwelt apart." This cannot be said with any propriety of Shakspeare, who certainly moved in a constellati^on of bright luminaries, and "drew after him a third part of the heavens." If we allow, for argument's sake (or for truth's, which is better), that he was in himself equal to all his competitors put together; yet there was more dramatic excellence in that age than in the whole of the period that has elapsed since. If his contemporaries, with their united strength, would hardly make one Shakspeare, certain it is that all his successors would not make half a one. With the exception of a single writer, Otway, and of a single play of his (*Venice Preserved*), there is nobody in tragedy and dramatic poetry (I do not here speak of comedy) to be compared to the great men of the age of Shakspeare, and immediately after. They are a mighty phalanx of kindred spirits closing him round, moving in the same orbit, and impelled by the same causes in their whirling and eccentric career. They had the same faults and the same excellences; the same strength and depth and richness, the same truth of character, passion, imagination, thought and language, thrown, heaped, massed together without careful polishing or exact method, but poured out in unconcerned profusion from the lap of nature and genius in boundless and unrivalled magnificence. The sweetness of Dekker, the thought of Marston, the gravity of Chapman, the grace of Fletcher and his young-eyed wit, Jonson's learned sock, the flowing vein of Middleton, Heywood's ease, the pathos of Webster, and Marlow's deep designs, add a double lustre to the sweetness, thought, gravity, grace, wit, artless nature, copiousness, ease, pathos, and sublime conceptions of Shakspeare's Muse. They are indeed the scale by which we can best ascend to the true knowledge and love of him. Our admiration of them does not lessen our relish for him: but, on the contrary, increases

and confirms it.—For such an extraordinary combination and development of fancy and genius many causes may be assigned; and we may seek for the chief of them in religion, in politics, in the circumstances of the time, the recent diffusion of letters, in local situation, and in the character of the men who adorned that period, and availed themselves so nobly of the advantages placed within their reach.

I shall here attempt to give a general sketch of these causes, and of the manner in which they operated to mould and stamp the poetry of the country at the period of which I have to treat; independently of incidental and fortuitous causes, for which there is no accounting, but which, after all, have often the greatest share in determining the most important results.

The first cause I shall mention, as contributing to this general effect, was the Reformation, which had just then taken place. This event gave a mighty impulse and increased activity to thought and inquiry, and agitated the inert mass of accumulated prejudices throughout Europe. The effect of the concussion was general; but the shock was greatest in this country. It toppled down the full-grown, intolerable abuses of centuries at a blow; heaved the ground from under the feet of bigotted faith and slavish obedience; and the roar and dashing of opinions, loosened from their accustomed hold, might be heard like the noise of an angry sea, and has never yet subsided. Germany first broke the spell of misbegotten fear, and gave the watch-word; but England joined the shout, and echoed it back with her island voice, from her thousand cliffs and craggy shores, in a longer and a louder strain. With that cry, the genius of Great Britain rose, and threw down the gauntlet to the nations. There was a mighty fermentation: the waters were out; public opinion was in a state of projection. Lib-

erty was held out to all to think and speak the truth. Men's brains were busy; their spirits stirring; their hearts full; and their hands not idle. Their eyes were opened to expect the greatest things, and their ears burned with curiosity and zeal to know the truth, that the truth might make them free. The death-blow which had been struck at scarlet vice and bloated hypocrisy, loosened their tongues, and made the talismans and love-tokens of Popish superstition, with which she had beguiled her followers and committed abominations with the people, fall harmless from their necks.

The translation of the Bible was the chief engine in the great work. It threw open, by a secret spring, the rich treasures of religion and morality, which had been there locked up as in a shrine. It revealed the visions of the prophets, and conveyed the lessons of inspired teachers (such they were thought) to the meanest of the people. It gave them a common interest in the common cause. Their hearts burnt within them as they read. It gave a *mind* to the people, by giving them common subjects of thought and feeling. It cemented their union of character and sentiment: it created endless diversity and collision of opinion. They found objects to employ their faculties, and a motive in the magnitude of the consequences attached to them, to exert the utmost eagerness in the pursuit of truth, and the most daring intrepidity in maintaining it. Religious controversy sharpens the understanding by the subtlety and remoteness of the topics it discusses, and braces the will by their infinite importance. We perceive in the history of this period a nervous masculine intellect. No levity, no feebleness, no indifference; or if there were, it is a relaxation from the intense activity which gives a tone to its general character. But there is a gravity approaching to piety; a seriousness of impression, a conscientious

severity of argument, an habitual fervour and enthusiasm in their mode of handling almost every subject. The debates of the schoolmen were sharp and subtle enough; but they wanted interest and grandeur, and were besides confined to a few: they did not affect the general mass of the community. But the Bible was thrown open to all ranks and conditions "to run and read," with its wonderful table of contents from Genesis to the Revelations. Every village in England would present the scene so well described in Burns's *Cotter's Saturday Night*. I cannot think that all this variety and weight of knowledge could be thrown in all at once upon the mind of a people, and not make some impression upon it, the traces of which might be discerned in the manners and literature of the age. For to leave more disputable points, and take only the historical parts of the Old Testament, or the moral sentiments of the New, there is nothing like them in the power of exciting awe and admiration, or of rivetting sympathy. We see what Milton has made of the account of the Creation, from the manner in which he has treated it, imbued and impregnated with the spirit of the time of which we speak. Or what is there equal (in that romantic interest and patriarchal simplicity which goes to the heart of a country, and rouses it, as it were, from its lair in wastes and wildernesses) equal to the story of Joseph and his Brethren, of Rachael and Laban, of Jacob's Dream, of Ruth and Boaz, the descriptions in the Book of Job, the deliverance of the Jews out of Egypt, or the account of their captivity and return from Babylon? There is in all these parts of the Scripture, and numberless more of the same kind, to pass over the Orphic hymns of David, the prophetic denunciations of Isaiah, or the gorgeous visions of Ezekiel, an originality, a vastness of conception, a depth and tenderness of feeling, and a touching simplicity in the mode of narration, which he who does

not feel, need be made of no "penetrable stuff." There is something in the character of Christ too (leaving religious faith quite out of the question) of more sweetness and majesty, and more likely to work a change in the mind of man, by the contemplation of its idea alone, than any to be found in history, whether actual or feigned. This character is that of a sublime humanity, such as was never seen on earth before, nor since. This shone manifestly both in his words and actions. We see it in his washing the Disciples' feet the night before his death, that unspeakable instance of humility and love, above all art, all meanness, and all pride, and in the leave he took of them on that occasion, "My peace I give unto you, that peace which the world cannot give, give I unto you;" and in his last commandment, that "they should love one another." Who can read the account of his behaviour on the cross, when turning to his mother he said, "Woman, behold thy son," and to the Disciple John, "Behold thy mother," and "from that hour that Disciple took her to his own home," without having his heart smote within him! We see it in his treatment of the woman taken in adultery, and in his excuse for the woman who poured precious ointment on his garment as an offering of devotion and love, which is here all in all. His religion was the religion of the heart. We see it in his discourse with the Disciples as they walked together towards Emmaus, when their hearts burned within them; in his sermon from the Mount, in his parable of the good Samaritan, and in that of the Prodigal Son—in every act and word of his life, a grace, a mildness, a dignity and love, a patience and wisdom worthy of the Son of God. His whole life and being were imbued, steeped in this word, *charity*; it was the spring, the well-head from which every thought and feeling gushed into act; and it was this that breathed a mild glory from his face in that

last agony upon the cross, "when the meek Saviour bowed his head and died," praying for his enemies. He was the first true teacher of morality; for he alone conceived the idea of a pure humanity. He redeemed man from the worship of that idol, self, and instructed him by precept and example to love his neighbour as himself, to forgive our enemies, to do good to those that curse us and despitefully use us. He taught the love of good for the sake of good, without regard to personal or sinister views, and made the affections of the heart the sole seat of morality, instead of the pride of the understanding or the sternness of the will. In answering the question, "who is our neighbour?" as one who stands in need of our assistance, and whose wounds we can bind up, he has done more to humanize the thoughts and tame the unruly passions, than all who have tried to reform and benefit mankind. The very idea of abstract benevolence, of the desire to do good because another wants our services, and of regarding the human race as one family, the offspring of one common parent, is hardly to be found in any other code or system. It was "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The Greeks and Romans never thought of considering others, but as they were Greeks or Romans, as they were bound to them by certain positive ties, or, on the other hand, as separated from them by fiercer antipathies. Their virtues were the virtues of political machines, their vices were the vices of demons, ready to inflict or to endure pain with obdurate and remorseless inflexibility of purpose. But in the Christian religion, "we perceive a softness coming over the heart of a nation, and the iron scales that fence and harden it, melt and drop off." It becomes malleable, capable of pity, of forgiveness, of relaxing in its claims, and remitting its power. We strike it, and it does not hurt us: it is not steel or marble, but flesh and blood,

clay tempered with tears, and "soft as sinews of the newborn babe." The gospel was first preached to the poor, for it consulted their wants and interests, not its own pride and arrogance. It first promulgated the equality of mankind in the community of duties and benefits. It denounced the iniquities of the chief Priests and Pharisees, and declared itself at variance with principalities and powers, for it sympathizes not with the oppressor, but the oppressed. It first abolished slavery, for it did not consider the power of the will to inflict injury, as clothing it with a right to do so. Its law is good, not power. It at the same time tended to wean the mind from the grossness of sense, and a particle of its divine flame was lent to brighten and purify the lamp of love!

There have been persons who, being sceptics as to the divine mission of Christ, have taken an unaccountable prejudice to his doctrines, and have been disposed to deny the merit of his character; but this was not the feeling of the great men in the age of Elizabeth (whatever might be their belief) one of whom says of him, with a boldness equal to its piety:

"The best of men .
That e'er wore earth about him was a sufferer;
A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit;
The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

This was old honest Deckar, and the lines ought to embalm his memory to every one who has a sense either of religion, or philosophy, or humanity, or true genius. Nor can I help thinking, that we may discern the traces of the influence exerted by religious faith in the spirit of the poetry of the age of Elizabeth, in the means of exciting terror and pity, in the delineation of the passions of grief, remorse, love, sympathy, the sense of shame, in the fond

desires, the longings after immortality, in the heaven of hope, and the abyss of despair it lays open to us.*

The literature of this age then, I would say, was strongly influenced (among other causes), first by the spirit of Christianity, and secondly by the spirit of Protestantism.

The effects of the Reformation on politics and philosophy may be seen in the writings and history of the next and of the following ages. They are still at work, and will continue to be so. The effects on the poetry of the time were chiefly confined to the moulding of the character, and giving a powerful impulse to the intellect of the country. The immediate use or application that was made of religion to subjects of imagination and fiction was not (from an obvious ground of separation) so direct or frequent, as that which was made of the classical and romantic literature.

For much about the same time, the rich and fascinating stores of the Greek and Roman mythology, and those of the romantic poetry of Spain and Italy, were eagerly explored by the curious, and thrown open in translations to the admiring gaze of the vulgar. This last circumstance could hardly have afforded so much advantage to the poets of that day, who were themselves, in fact, the translators, as it shews the general curiosity and increasing interest in such subjects, as a prevailing feature of the times. There were translations of Tasso by Fairfax, and of Ariosto by Harrington, of Homer and Hesiod by Chapman, and of Virgil long before, and Ovid soon after; there was Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch, of which Shakespeare has made such admirable use in his Coriolanus and Julius Cæsar; and Ben Jonson's tragedies of Catiline and Sejanus may themselves be considered as almost literal

* In some Roman Catholic countries, pictures in part supplied the place of the translations of the Bible: and this dumb art arose in the silence of the written oracles.

translations into verse, of Tacitus, Sallust, and Cicero's Orations in his consulship. Boccaccio, the divine Boccaccio, Petrarch, Dante, the satirist Aretine, Machiavel, Castiglione, and others, were familiar to our writers, and they make occasional mention of some few French authors, as Ronsard and Du Bartas; for the French literature had not at this stage arrived at its Augustan period, and it was the imitation of their literature a century afterwards, when it had arrived at its greatest height (itself copied from the Greek and Latin), that enfeebled and impoverished our own. But of the time that we are considering, it might be said, without much extravagance, that every breath that blew, that every wave that rolled to our shores, brought with it some accession to our knowledge, which was engrafted on the national genius. In fact, all the disposeable materials that had been accumulating for a long period of time, either in our own, or in foreign countries, were now brought together, and required nothing more than to be wrought up, polished, or arranged in striking forms, for ornament and use. To this every inducement prompted, the novelty of the acquisition of knowledge in many cases, the emulation of foreign wits, and of immortal works, the want and the expectation of such works among ourselves, the opportunity and encouragement afforded for their production by leisure and affluence; and, above all, the insatiable desire of the mind to beget its own image, and to construct out of itself, and for the delight and admiration of the world and posterity, that excellence of which the idea exists hitherto only in its own breast, and the impression of which it would make as universal as the eye of heaven, the benefit as common as the air we breathe. The first impulse of genius is to create what never existed before: the contemplation of that, which is so created, is sufficient to satisfy the demands of taste; and it is the habitual study and imita-

tion of the original models that takes away the power, and even wish to do the like. Taste limps after genius, and from copying the artificial models, we lose sight of the living principle of nature. It is the effort we make, and the impulse we acquire, in overcoming the first obstacles, that projects us forward; it is the necessity for exertion that makes us conscious of our strength; but this necessity and this impulse once removed, the tide of fancy and enthusiasm, which is at first a running stream, soon settles and crusts into the standing pool of dulness, criticism, and *virtù*.

What also gave an unusual *impetus* to the mind of man at this period, was the discovery of the New World, and the reading of voyages and travels. Green islands and golden sands seemed to arise, as by enchantment, out of the bosom of the watery waste, and invite the cupidity, or wing the imagination of the dreaming speculator. Fairy land was realized in new and unknown worlds. "Fortunate fields and groves and flowery vales, thrice happy isles," were found floating "like those Hesperian gardens famed of old," beyond Atlantic seas, as dropt from the zenith. The people, the soil, the clime, every thing gave unlimited scope to the curiosity of the traveller and reader. Other manners might be said to enlarge the bounds of knowledge, and new mines of wealth were tumbled at our feet. It is from a voyage to the Straits of Magellan that Shakspeare has taken the hint of Prospero's Enchanted Island, and of the savage Caliban with his god Setebos.* Spenser seems to have had the same feeling in his mind in the production of his Faery Queen, and vindicates his poetic fiction on this very ground of analogy.

"Right well I wote, most mighty sovereign,
That all this famous antique history

* See *A Voyage to the Straits of Magellan, 1594.*

Of some the abundance of an idle brain
Will judged be, and painted forgery,
Rather than matter of just memory:
Since none that breatheth living air, doth know
Where is that happy land of faery
Which I so much do vaunt, but no where show,
But vouch antiquities, which nobody can know.

But let that man with better sense advise,
That of the world least part to us is read:
And daily how through hardy enterprize
Many great regions are discovered,
Which to late age were never mentioned.
Who ever heard of th' Indian Peru?
Or who in venturous vessel measured
The Amazons' huge river, now found true?
Or fruitfulest Virginia who did ever view?

Yet all these were when no man did them know,
Yet have from wisest ages hidden been:
And later times things more unknown shall show.
Why then should witless man so much misween
That nothing is but that which he hath seen?
What if within the moon's fair shining sphere,
What if in every other star unseen,
Of other worlds he happily should hear,
He wonder would much more; yet such to some appear."

Fancy's air-drawn pictures after history's waking dream shewed like clouds over mountains; and from the romance of real life to the idlest fiction, the transition seemed easy.—Shakspeare, as well as others of his time, availed himself of the old Chronicles, and of the traditions or fabulous inventions contained in them in such ample measure, and which had not yet been appropriated to the purposes of poetry or the drama. The stage was a new thing; and those who had to supply its demands laid their hands upon whatever came within their reach: they were not particular as to the means, so that they gained the end. Lear is founded upon an old ballad; Othello on an Italian novel; Hamlet on a Danish, and Macbeth on a Scotch tradition:

one of which is to be found in Saxo-Grammaticus, and the last in Hollingshed. The Ghost-scenes and the Witches in each, are authenticated in the old Gothic history. There was also this connecting link between the poetry of this age and the supernatural traditions of a former one, that the belief in them was still extant, and in full force and visible operation among the vulgar (to say no more) in the time of our authors. The appalling and wild chimeras of superstition and ignorance, "those bodiless creations that ecstasy is very cunning in," were inwoven with existing manners and opinions, and all their effects on the passions of terror or pity might be gathered from common and actual observation—might be discerned in the workings of the face, the expressions of the tongue, the writhings of a troubled conscience. "Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men may read strange matters." Midnight and secret murders too, from the imperfect state of the police, were more common; and the ferocious and brutal manners that would stamp the brow of the hardened ruffian or hired assassin, more incorrigible and undisguised. The portraits of Tyrrel and Forrest were, no doubt, done from the life. We find that the ravages of the plague, the destructive rage of fire, the poisoned chalice, lean famine, the serpent's mortal sting, and the fury of wild beasts, were the common topics of their poetry, as they were common occurrences in more remote periods of history. They were the strong ingredients thrown into the cauldron of tragedy, to make it "thick and slab." Man's life was (as it appears to me) more full of traps and pit-falls; of hair-breadth accidents by flood and field; more way-laid by sudden and startling evils; it trod on the brink of hope and fear; stumbled upon fate unawares; while the imagination, close behind it, caught at and clung to the shape of danger, or "snatched a wild and fearful joy" from its escape. The accidents of nature were

less provided against; the excesses of the passions and of lawless power were less regulated, and produced more strange and desperate catastrophes. The tales of Boccaccio are founded on the great pestilence of Florence, Fletcher the poet died of the plague, and Marlow was stabbed in a tavern quarrel. The strict authority of parents, the inequality of ranks, or the hereditary feuds between different families, made more unhappy loves or matches.

“The course of true love never did run even.”

Again, the heroic and martial spirit which breathes in our elder writers, was yet in considerable activity in the reign of Elizabeth. “The age of chivalry was not then quite gone, nor the glory of Europe extinguished for ever.” Jousts and tournaments were still common with the nobility in England and in foreign countries: Sir Philip Sidney was particularly distinguished for his proficiency in these exercises (and indeed fell a martyr to his ambition as a soldier)—and the gentle Surrey was still more famous, on the same account, just before him. It is true, the general use of fire-arms gradually superseded the necessity of skill in the sword, or bravery in the person: and as a symptom of the rapid degeneracy in this respect, we find Sir John Suckling soon after boasting of himself as one—

“Who prized black eyes, and a lucky hit
At bowls, above all the trophies of wit.”

It was comparatively an age of peace,

“Like strength reposing on his own right arm;”

but the sound of civil combat might still be heard in the distance, the spear glittered to the eye of memory, or the clashing of armour struck on the imagination of the ardent and the young. They were borderers on the savage state, on the

times of war and bigotry, though in the lap of arts, of luxury, and knowledge. They stood on the shore and saw the billows rolling after the storm: "they heard the tumult, and were still." The manners and out-of-door amusements were more tinctured with a spirit of adventure and romance. The war with wild beasts, &c. was more strenuously kept up in country sports. I do not think we could get from sedentary poets, who had never mingled in the vicissitudes, the dangers, or excitements of the chase, such descriptions of hunting and other athletic games, as are to be found in Shakspeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* or Fletcher's *Noble Kinsmen*.

With respect to the good cheer and hospitable living of those times, I cannot agree with an ingenious and agreeable writer of the present day, that it was general or frequent. The very stress laid upon certain holidays and festivals, shews that they did not keep up the same Saturnalian licence and open house all the year round. They reserved themselves for great occasions, and made the best amends they could, for a year of abstinence and toil by a week of merriment and convivial indulgence. Persons in middle life at this day, who can afford a good dinner every day, do not look forward to it as any particular subject of exultation: the poor peasant, who can only contrive to treat himself to a joint of meat on a Sunday, considers it as an event in the week. So, in the old Cambridge comedy of the *Return from Parnassus*, we find this indignant description of the progress of luxury in those days, put into the mouth of one of the speakers.

"Why is't not strange to see a ragged clerke,
Some stammell weaver, or some butcher's sonne,
That scrubb'd a late within a sleeveless gowne,
When the commencement, like a morrice dance,
Hath put a bell or two about his legges,
Created him a sweet cleane gentleman:

How then he 'gins to follow fashions.
He whose thin sire dwelt in a smokye rooffe,
Must make tobacco, and must wear a locke.
His thirsty dad drinckes in a wooden bowle,
But his sweet self is served in silver plate.
His hungry sire will scrape you twenty legges
For one good Christmas meal on new year's day,
But his mawe must be capon cramm'd each day."

Act III. Scene 2.

This does not look as if in those days "it snowed of meat and drink," as a matter of course throughout the year!—The distinctions of dress, the badges of different professions, the very signs of the shops, which we have set aside for written inscriptions over the doors, were, as Mr. Lamb observes, a sort of visible language to the imagination, and hints for thought. Like the costume of different foreign nations, they had an immediate striking and picturesque effect, giving scope to the fancy. The surface of society was embossed with hieroglyphics, and poetry existed "in art and compliment extern." The poetry of former times might be directly taken from real life, as our poetry is taken from the poetry of former times. Finally, the face of nature, which was the same glorious object then that it is now, was open to them; and coming first, they gathered her fairest flowers to live for ever in their verse:—the movements of the human heart were not hid from them, for they had the same passions as we, only less disguised, and less subject to controul. Decker has given an admirable description of a mad-house in one of his plays. But it might be perhaps objected, that it was only a literal account taken from Bedlam at that time; and it might be answered, that the old poets took the same method of describing the passions and fancies of men whom they met at large, which forms the point of communion between us: for the title of the old play, "A Mad World, my Masters," is hardly yet

obsolete; and we are pretty much the same Bedlam still, perhaps a little better managed, like the real one, and with more care and humanity shewn to the patients!

Lastly, to conclude this account; what gave a unity and common direction to all these causes, was the natural genius of the country, which was strong in these writers in proportion to their strength. We are a nation of islanders, and we cannot help it; nor mend ourselves if we would. We are something in ourselves, nothing when we try to ape others. Music and painting are not our *forte*: for what we have done in that way has been little, and that borrowed from others with great difficulty. But we may boast of our poets and philosophers. That's something. We have had strong heads and sound hearts among us. Thrown on one side of the world, and left to bustle for ourselves, we have fought out many a battle for truth and freedom. That is our natural style; and it were to be wished we had in no instance departed from it. Our situation has given us a certain cast of thought and character; and our liberty has enabled us to make the most of it. We are of a stiff clay, not moulded into every fashion, with stubborn joints not easily bent. We are slow to think, and therefore impressions do not work upon us till they act in masses. We are not forward to express our feelings, and therefore they do not come from us till they force their way in the most impetuous eloquence. Our language is, as it were, to begin anew, and we make use of the most singular and boldest combinations to explain ourselves. Our wit comes from us, "like birdlime, brains and all." We pay too little attention to form and method, leave our works in an unfinished state, but still the materials we work in are solid and of nature's mint; we do not deal in counterfeits. We both under and over-do, but we keep an eye to the prominent features, the main chance. We are more for weight than

show; care only about what interests ourselves, instead of trying to impose upon others by plausible appearances, and are obstinate and intractable in not conforming to common rules, by which many arrive at their ends with half the real waste of thought and trouble. We neglect all but the principal object, gather our force to make a great blow, bring it down, and relapse into sluggishness and indifference again. *Materiam superabat opus*, cannot be said of us. We may be accused of grossness, but not of flimsiness; of extravagance, but not of affectation; of want of art and refinement, but not of a want of truth and nature. Our literature, in a word, is Gothic and grotesque; unequal and irregular; not cast in a previous mould, nor of one uniform texture, but of great weight in the whole, and of incomparable value in the best parts. It aims at an excess of beauty or power, hits or misses, and is either very good indeed, or absolutely good for nothing. This character applies in particular to our literature in the age of Elizabeth, which is its best period, before the introduction of a rage for French rules and French models; for whatever may be the value of our own original style of composition, there can be neither offence nor presumption in saying, that it is at least better than our second-hand imitations of others. Our understanding (such as it is, and must remain to be good for anything) is not a thoroughfare for common places, smooth as the palm of one's hand, but full of knotty points and jutting excrescences, rough, uneven, overgrown with brambles; and I like this aspect of the mind (as some one said of the country), where nature keeps a good deal of the soil in her own hands. Perhaps the genius of our poetry has more of Pan than of Apollo; "but Pan is a God, Apollo is no more!"

II

SPENSER

SPENSER flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was sent with Sir John Davies into Ireland, of which he has left behind him some tender recollections in his description of the bog of Allan, and a record in an ably written paper, containing observations on the state of that country and the means of improving it, which remain in full force to the present day. Spenser died at an obscure inn in London, it is supposed in distressed circumstances. The treatment he received from Burleigh is well known. Spenser, as well as Chaucer, was engaged in active life; but the genius of his poetry was not active: it is inspired by the love of ease, and relaxation from all the cares and business of life. Of all the poets, he is the most poetical. Though much later than Chaucer, his obligations to preceding writers were less. He has in some measure borrowed the plan of his poem (as a number of distinct narratives) from Ariosto; but he has engrafted upon it an exuberance of fancy, and an endless voluptuousness of sentiment, which are not to be found in the Italian writer. Farther, Spenser is even more of an inventor in the subject-matter. There is an originality, richness, and variety in his allegorical personages and fictions, which almost vies with the splendor of the ancient mythology. If Ariosto transports us into the regions of romance, Spenser's poetry is all fairy-land. In Ariosto, we walk upon the ground, in a company, gay, fantastic, and adventurous enough. In

Spenser, we wander in another world, among ideal beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills and fairer valleys. He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it; and fulfils the delightful promise of our youth. He waves his wand of enchantment—and at once embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects. The two worlds of reality and of fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem more distinct than his perceptions. He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness. In the Mask of Cupid he makes the God of Love “clap on high his coloured winges *twain*,” and it is said of Gluttony in the Procession of the Passions,

“In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad.”

At times he becomes picturesque from his intense love of beauty; as where he compares Prince Arthur's crest to the appearance of the almond tree:

“Upon the top of all his lofty crest,
 A bunch of hairs discolour'd diversely
 With sprinkled pearl and gold full richly drest
 Did shake and seem'd to daunce for jollity;
 Like to an almond tree ymounted high
 On top of green Selenis all alone,
 With blossoms brave bedecked daintily;
 Her tender locks do tremble every one
 At every little breath that under heav'n is blown.”

The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind; and he is guided in his fantastic delineations by no rule but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination. He luxuriates equally in scenes of Eastern magnificence; or the still solitude of a hermit's cell—in the extremes of sensuality or refinement.

In reading the Faery Queen, you see a little withered old man by a wood-side opening a wicket, a giant, and a dwarf lagging far behind, a damsel in a boat upon an enchanted lake, wood-nymphs, and satyrs; and all of a sudden you are transported into a lofty palace, with tapers burning, amidst knights and ladies, with dance and revelry, and song, "and mask, and antique pageantry." What can be more solitary, more shut up in itself, than his description of the house of Sleep, to which Archimago sends for a dream:

"And more to lull him in his slumber soft
 A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down,
 And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,
 Mix'd with a murmuring wind, much like the sound
 Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swoond.
 No other noise, nor people's troublous cries
 That still are wont t' annoy the walled town
 Might there be heard; but careless Quiet lies
 Wrapt in eternal silence, far from enemies."

It is as if "the honey-heavy dew of slumber" had settled on his pen in writing these lines. How different in the subject (and yet how like in beauty) is the following description of the Bower of Bliss:

"Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound
 Of all that mote delight a dainty ear;
 Such as at once might not on living ground,
 Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere:
 Right hard it was for wight which did it hear,
 To tell what manner musicke that mote be;
 For all that pleasing is to living eare
 Was there consorted in one harmonie:
 Birds, voices, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.

"The joyous birdes shrouded in chearefull shade
 Their notes unto the voice attempted sweet:
 The angelical soft trembling voices made
 To th' instruments divine respondence meet.

The silver sounding instruments did meet
 With the base murmur of the water's fall;
 The water's fall with difference discreet,
 Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
 The gentle warbling wind low answered to all."

The remainder of the passage has all that voluptuous pathos, and languid brilliancy of fancy, in which this writer excelled:

"The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay;
 Ah! see, whoso fayre thing dost fain to see,
 In springing flower the image of thy day!
 Ah! see the virgin rose, how sweetly she
 Doth first peep forth with bashful modesty,
 That fairer seems the less ye see her may!
 Lo! see soon after, how more bold and free
 Her bared bosom she doth broad display;
 Lo! see soon after, how she fades and falls away!

So passeth in the passing of a day
 Of mortal life the leaf, the bud, the flower;
 Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
 That erst was sought to deck both bed and bower
 Of many a lady and many a paramour!
 Gather therefore the rose whilst yet is prime,
 For soon comes age that will her pride deflower;
 Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time,
 Whilst loving thou mayst loved be with equal crime." *

He ceased; and then gan all the quire of birds
 Their divers notes to attune unto his lay,
 As in approvance of his pleasing wordes.
 The constant pair heard all that he did say,
 Yet swerved not, but kept their forward way
 Through many covert groves and thickets close,
 In which they creeping did at last display †
 That wanton lady with her lover loose,
 Whose sleepy head she in her lap did soft dispose.

* Taken from Tasso.

† This word is an instance of those unwarrantable freedoms which Spenser sometimes took with language.

Upon a bed of roses she was laid
 As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin;
 And was arrayed or rather disarrayed,
 All in a veil of silk and silver thin,
 That hid no whit her alabaster skin,
 But rather shewed more white, if more might be:
 More subtle web Arachne cannot spin;
 Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
 Of scorched dew, do not in the air more lightly flee.

Her snowy breast was bare to greedy spoil
 Of hungry eyes which n'ote therewith be fill'd.
 And yet through languor of her late sweet toil
 Few drops more clear than nectar forth distill'd,
 That like pure Orient perles adown it trill'd;
 And her fair eyes sweet smiling in delight
 Moistened their fiery beams, with which she thrill'd
 Frail hearts, yet quenched not; like starry light,
 Which sparkling on the silent waves does seem more bright."

The finest things in Spenser are, the character of Una, in the first book; the House of Pride; the Cave of Mammon, and the Cave of Despair; the account of Memory, of whom it is said, among other things,

"The wars he well remember'd of King Nine,
 Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine;"

the description of Belphebe; the story of Florimel and the Witch's son; the Gardens of Adonis, and the Bower of Bliss; the Mask of Cupid; and Colin Clout's vision, in the last book. But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but that they cannot understand it on account of the allegory. They are afraid of the allegory, as if they thought it would bite them: they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pike-

staff. It might as well be pretended that we cannot see Poussin's pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevents us from understanding Spenser. . For instance, when Britomart, seated amidst the young warriors, lets fall her hair and discovers her sex, is it necessary to know the part she plays in the allegory, to understand the beauty of the following stanza?

“And eke that stranger knight amongst the rest
 Was for like need enforc'd to disarray.
 Tho when as vailed was her lofty crest,
 Her golden locks that were in trammels gay
 Upbouden, did themselves adown display,
 And raught unto her heels like sunny beams
 That in a cloud their light did long time stay;
 Their vapour faded, shew their golden gleams,
 And through the persant air shoot forth their azure streams.”

Or is there any mystery in what is said of Belphebe, that her hair was sprinkled with flowers and blossoms which had been entangled in it as she fled through the woods? Or is it necessary to have a more distinct idea of Proteus, than that which is given of him in his boat, with the frightened Florimel at his feet, while

“—the cold icicles from his rough beard
 Dropped adown upon her snowy breast!”

Or is it not a sufficient account of one of the sea-gods that pass by them, to say—

“That was Arion crowned:—
 So went he playing on the watery plain.”

Or to take the Procession of the Passions that draw the coach of Pride, in which the figures of Idleness, of Gluttony, of Lechery, of Avarice, of Envy, and of Wrath speak, one should think, plain enough for themselves; such as this of Guttony:

“And by his side rode loathsome Gluttony,
 Deformed creature, on a filthy swine;
 His belly was up blown with luxury:
 And eke with fatness swollen were his eyne;
 And like a crane his neck was long and fine,
 With which he swallowed up excessive feast,
 For want whereof poor people oft did pine.

In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad;
 For other clothes he could not wear for heat;
 And on his head an ivy garland had,
 From under which fast trickled down the sweat:
 Still as he rode, he somewhat still did eat,
 And in his hand did bear a bouzing can,
 Of which he supt so oft, that on his seat
 His drunken corse he scarce upholden can;
 In shape and life more like a monster than a man.”

Or this of Lechery:

“And next to him rode lustfull Lechery
 Upon a bearded goat, whose rugged hair
 And whaly eyes (the sign of jealousy)
 Was like the person's self whom he did bear:
 Who rough and black, and filthy did appear.
 Unseemly man to please fair lady's eye:
 Yet he of ladies oft was loved dear,
 When fairer faces were bid standen by:
 O! who does know the bent of woman's fantsay?

In a green gown he clothed was full fair,
 Which underneath did hide his filthiness;
 And in his hand a burning heart he bare,
 Full of vain follies and new fangleness;
 For he was false and fraught with fickleness;
 And learned had to love with secret looks;
 And well could dance; and sing with ruefulness;
 And fortunes tell; and read in loving books;
 And thousand other ways to bait his fleshly hooks.

Inconstant man that loved all he saw,
 And lusted after all that he did love;
 Ne would his looser life be tied to law;
 But joyed weak women's hearts to tempt and prove,
 If from their loyal loves he might them move.”

This is pretty plain-spoken. Mr. Southey says of Spenser :

“ Yet not more sweet
Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise;
High priest of all the Muses' mysteries ! ”

On the contrary, no one was more apt to pry into mysteries which do not strictly belong to the Muses.

Of the same kind with the Procession of the Passions, as little obscure, and still more beautiful, is the Mask of Cupid, with his train of votaries :

“ The first was Fancy, like a lovely boy
Of rare aspect, and beauty without peer ;

His garment neither was of silk nor say,
But painted plumes in goodly order dight,
Like as the sun-burnt Indians do array
Their tawny bodies in their proudest plight ;
As those same plumes so seem'd he vain and light,
That by his gait might easily appear ;
For still he far'd as dancing in delight,
And in his hand a windy fan did bear
That in the idle air he mov'd still here and there.

And him beside march'd amorous Desire,
Who seem'd of riper years than the other swain,
Yet was that other swain this elder's sire,
And gave him being, common to them twain :
His garment was disguised very vain,
And his embroidered bonnet sat awry ;
'Twixt both his hands few sparks he close did strain,
Which still he blew, and kindled busily,
That soon they life conceiv'd and forth in flames did fly.

Next after him went Doubt, who was yclad
In a discolour'd coat of strange disguise,
That at his back a broad capuccio had,
And sleeves dependant *Albanese-wise* ;
He lookt askew with his mistrustful eyes,
And nicely trod, as thorns lay in his way,
Or that the floor to shrink he did advise ;
And on a broken reed he still did stay
His feeble steps, which shrunk when hard thereon he lay.

With him went Daunger, cloth'd in ragged weed,
 Made of bear's skin, that him more dreadful made;
 Yet his own face was dreadfull, ne did need
 Strange horror to deform his grisly shade;
 A net in th' one hand, and a rusty blade
 In th' other was; this Mischiefe, that Mishap;
 With th' one his foes he threat'ned to invade,
 With th' other he his friends meant to enwrap;
 For whom he could not kill he practiz'd to entrap.

Next him was Fear, all arm'd from top to toe,
 Yet thought himself not safe enough thereby,
 But fear'd each shadow moving to and fro;
 And his own arms when glittering he did spy
 Or clashing heard, he fast away did fly,
 As ashes pale of hue, and winged-heel'd;
 And evermore on Daunger fixt his eye,
 'Gainst whom he always bent a brazen shield,
 Which his right hand unarmed fearfully did wield.

With him went Hope in rank, a handsome maid,
 Of chearfull look and lovely to behold;
 In silken samite she was light array'd,
 And her fair locks were woven up in gold;
 She always smil'd, and in her hand did hold
 An holy-water sprinkle dipt in dew,
 With which she sprinkled favours manifold
 On whom she list, and did great liking shew,
 Great liking unto many, but true love to few.

Next after them, the winged God himself
 Came riding on a lion ravenous,
 Taught to obey the menage of that elfe
 That man and beast with power imperious
 Subdueth to his kingdom tyrannous:
 His blindfold eyes he bade awhile unbind,
 That his proud spoil of that same dolorous
 Fair dame he might behold in perfect kind;
 Which seen, he much rejoiced in his cruel mind.

Of which full proud, himself uprearing high,
 He looked round about with stern disdain,
 And did survey his goodly company;
 And marshalling the evil-ordered train,
 With that the darts which his right hand did strain,

Full dreadfully he shook, that all did quake,
And clapt on high his colour'd winges twain,
That all his many it afraid did make:
Tho, blinding him again, his way he forth did take."

The description of Hope, in this series of historical portraits, is one of the most beautiful in Spenser: and the triumph of Cupid at the mischief he has made, is worthy of the malicious urchin deity. In reading these descriptions, one can hardly avoid being reminded of Rubens's allegorical pictures; but the account of Satyrane taming the lion's whelps and lugging the bear's cubs along in his arms while yet an infant, whom his mother so naturally advises to "go seek some other play-fellows," has even more of this high picturesque character. Nobody but Rubens could have painted the fancy of Spenser; and he could not have given the sentiment, the airy dream that hovers over it!

With all this, Spenser neither makes us laugh nor weep. The only jest in his poem is an allegorical play upon words, where he describes Malbecco as escaping in the herd of goats, "by the help of his fayre horns on hight." But he has been unjustly charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. He has not indeed the pathos of immediate action or suffering, which is more properly the dramatic; but he has all the pathos of sentiment and romance—all that belongs to distant objects of terror, and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength, in like manner, is not strength of will or action, of bone and muscle, nor is it coarse and palpable—but it assumes a character of vastness and sublimity seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with the appalling associations of preternatural agency. We need only turn, in proof of this, to the Cave of Despair, or the Cave of Mammon, or to the account of the change of Malbecco into

Jealousy. The following stanzas, in the description of the Cave of Mammon, the grisly house of Plutus, are unrivalled for the portentous massiness of the forms, the splendid chiaro-scuro, and shadowy horror.

“That house’s form within was rude and strong,
 Like an huge cave hewn out of rocky clift,
 From whose rough vault the ragged breaches hung,
 Embossed with massy gold of glorious gift,
 And with rich metal loaded every rift,
 That heavy ruin they did seem to threat :
 And over them Arachne high did lift
 Her cunning web, and spread her subtle net,
 Enwrapped in foul smoke, and clouds more black than jet.

Both roof and floor, and walls were all of gold,
 But overgrown with dust and old decay.*
 And hid in darkness that none could behold
 The hue thereof: for view of cheerful day
 Did never in that house itself display,
 But a faint shadow of uncertain light;
 Such as a lamp whose light doth fade away;
 Or as the moon clothed with cloudy night
 Does shew to him that walks in fear and sad affright.

And over all sad Horror with grim hue
 Did always soar, beating his iron wings;
 And after him owls and night-ravens flew,
 The hateful messengers of heavy things,
 Of death and dolour telling sad tidings;
 While sad Celleno, sitting on a clift,
 A song of bale and bitter sorrow sings,
 That heart of flint asunder could have rift;
 Which having ended, after him she fieth swift.”

The Cave of Despair is described with equal gloominess and power of fancy; and the fine moral declamation of the

*“That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
 Tho’ they are made and moulded of things past,
 And give to Dust, that is a little gilt,
 More laud than gold o’er-dusted.”

Troilus and Cressida.

owner of it, on the evils of life, almost makes one in love with death. In the story of Malbecco, who is haunted by jealousy, and in vain strives to run away from his own thoughts—

“High over hill and over dale he flies”—

the truth of human passion and the preternatural ending are equally striking.—It is not fair to compare Spenser with Shakspeare, in point of interest. A fairer comparison would be with Comus; and the result would not be unfavourable to Spenser. There is only one work of the same allegorical kind, which has more interest than Spenser (with scarcely less imagination): and that is the *Pilgrim's Progress*. The three first books of the *Faery Queen* are very superior to the three last. One would think that Pope, who used to ask if any one had ever read the *Faery Queen* through, had only dipped into these last. The only things in them equal to the former, are the account of Talus, the Iron Man, and the delightful episode of Pastorella.

The language of Spenser is full, and copious, to overflowing: it is less pure and idiomatic than Chaucer's, and is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from the different languages of Europe, both ancient and modern. He was, probably, seduced into a certain license of expression by the difficulty of filling up the moulds of his complicated rhymed stanza from the limited resources of his native language. This stanza, with alternate and repeatedly recurring rhymes, is borrowed from the Italians. It is peculiarly fitted to their language, which abounds in similar vowel terminations, and is as little adapted to ours, from the stubborn, unaccommodating resistance which the consonant endings of the northern languages make to this sort of endless sing-song.—Not that I would, on that account, part with the stanza of Spenser. We are, perhaps,

indebted to this very necessity of finding out new forms of expression, and to the occasional faults to which it led, for a poetical language rich and varied and magnificent beyond all former, and almost all later example. His versification is, at once, the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, "in many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out"—that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation—dwelling on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakspeare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea; but the effect is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled.

III

SHAKSPEARE

THE four greatest names in English poetry, are almost the four first we come to—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton. There are no others that can really be put in competition with these. The two last have had justice done them by the voice of common fame. Their names are blazoned in the very firmament of reputation; while the two first, (though “the fault has been more in their stars than in themselves that they are underlings”) either never emerged far above the horizon, or were too soon involved in the obscurity of time. The three first of these are excluded from Dr. Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets* (Shakspeare indeed is so from the dramatic form of his compositions): and the fourth, Milton, is admitted with a reluctant and churlish welcome.

In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manners, or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakspeare, as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term): and Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are; Spenser, as we wish them to be; Shakspeare, as they would be; and Milton as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all: but the principle or moving power, to which this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer, was habit, or inveterate prejudice; in Spenser, novelty, and the

love of the marvellous; in Shakspeare, it was the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances; and in Milton, only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity; of Spenser, remoteness; of Milton, elevation; of Shakspeare, everything.—It has been said by some critic, that Shakspeare was distinguished from the other dramatic writers of his day only by his wit; that they had all his other qualities but that; that one writer had as much sense, another as much fancy, another as much knowledge of character, another the same depth of passion, and another as great a power of language. This statement is not true; nor is the inference from it well-founded, even if it were. This person does not seem to have been aware that, upon his own shewing, the great distinction of Shakspeare's genius was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age, and not his differing from them in one accidental particular. But to have done with such minute and literal trifling.

The striking peculiarity of Shakspeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. He had "a mind reflecting ages past," and present:—all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His

genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar: "All corners of the earth, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave," are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew, as those which they did not know, or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call, and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies "nodded to him, and did him curtesies:" and the night-hag bestrode the blast at the command of "his so potent art." The world of spirits lay open to him, like the world of real men and women: and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other; for if the preternatural characters he describes could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel, and act, as he makes them. He had only to think of any thing in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, "subject to the same skyey influences," the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality. Thus the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, "his frequent haunts and ancient neighbourhood,"

are given with a miraculous truth of nature, and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole "coheres semblably together" in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say,—you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decypher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the by-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So (as it has been ingeniously remarked) when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, "Me and thy *crying* self," flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy, and places the first and most trying scene of his misfortunes before us, with all that he must have suffered in the interval. How well the silent anguish of Macduff is conveyed to the reader, by the friendly expostulation of Malcolm—"What! man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows!" Again, Hamlet, in the scene with Rosencrans and Guildenstern, somewhat abruptly concludes his fine soliloquy on life by saying, "Man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so." Which is explained by their answer—"My lord, we had no such stuff in our thoughts. But we smiled to think, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you, whom we met on the way:"—as if while Hamlet was making this speech, his two old schoolfellows from Wittenberg had been really standing by, and he had seen them smiling by stealth, at the idea of the players crossing their minds. It is not "a combination and a form" of words, a set speech or two, a preconcerted theory of a character, that will do this: but all the persons concerned must have been present in the poet's imagination,

as at a kind of rehearsal; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion, and have been observed by others, passed through his, and is made known to the reader.—I may add in passing, that Shakspeare always gives the best directions for the costume and carriage of his heroes. Thus, to take one example, Ophelia gives the following account of Hamlet; and as Ophelia had seen Hamlet, I should think her word ought to be taken against that of any modern authority.

"Ophelia. My lord, as I was reading in my closet,
Prince Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
No hat upon his head, his stockings loose,
Ungartred, and down-gyved to his ancle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous,
As if he had been sent from hell
To speak of horrors, thus he comes before me.

Polonius. Mad for thy love!

Oph. My lord, I do not know,
But truly I do fear it.

Pol. What said he?

Oph. He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face,
As he would draw it: long staid he so;
At last, a little shaking of my arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound,
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
For out of doors he went without their help,
And to the last bended their light on me."

Act II. Scene 1.

How after this airy, fantastic idea of irregular grace and bewildered melancholy any one can play Hamlet, as we have seen it played, with strut, and stare, and antic right-

angled sharp-pointed gestures, it is difficult to say, unless it be that Hamlet is not bound, by the prompter's cue, to study the part of Ophelia. The account of Ophelia's death begins thus:

"There is a willow hanging o'er a brook,
That shows its hoary leaves in the glassy stream."——

Now this is an instance of the same unconscious power of mind which is as true to nature as itself. The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath, and it is this part of them which would appear "hoary" in the reflection in the brook. The same sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the mind's eye, is observable in the speech of Cleopatra, when conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence:—"He's speaking now, or murmuring, where's my serpent of old Nile?" How fine to make Cleopatra have this consciousness of her own character, and to make her feel that it is this for which Antony is in love with her! She says, after the battle of Actium, when Antony has resolved to risk another fight, "It is my birth-day; I had thought to have held it poor: but since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra." What other poet would have thought of such a casual resource of the imagination, or would have dared to avail himself of it? The thing happens in the play as it might have happened in fact.—That which, perhaps, more than any thing else distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakspeare from all others, is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the

character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and overheard what passed. As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it: so the dialogues in Shakspeare are carried on without any consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort. In the world of his imagination, every thing has a life, a place, and being of its own!

Chaucer's characters are sufficiently distinct from one another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions. They are consistent, but uniform; we get no new idea of them from first to last; they are not placed in different lights, nor are their subordinate *traits* brought out in new situations; they are like portraits or physiognomical studies, with the distinguishing features marked with inconceivable truth and precision, but that preserve the same unaltered air and attitude. Shak-

sppeare's are historical figures, equally true and correct, but put into action, where every nerve and muscle is displayed in the struggle with others, with all the effect of collision and contrast, with every variety of light and shade. Chaucer's characters are narrative, Shakspeare's dramatic, Milton's epic. That is, Chaucer told only as much of his story as he pleased, as was required for a particular purpose. He answered for his characters himself. In Shakspeare they are introduced upon the stage, are liable to be asked all sorts of questions, and are forced to answer for themselves. In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakspeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact with it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances. Milton took only a few simple principles of character, and raised them to the utmost conceivable grandeur, and refined them from every base alloy. His imagination, "nigh sphered in Heaven," claimed kindred only with what he saw from that height, and could raise to the same elevation with itself. He sat retired, and kept his state alone, "playing with wisdom;" while Shakspeare mingled with the crowd, and played the host, "to make society the sweeter welcome."

The passion in Shakspeare is of the same nature as his delineation of character. It is not some one habitual feeling or sentiment preying upon itself, growing out of itself, and moulding every thing to itself; it is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable with him; subject to all the fluctuations of caprice and accident; calling into play all the resources of the understanding and all the

energies of the will; irritated by obstacles or yielding to them; rising from small beginnings to its utmost height; now drunk with hope, now stung to madness, now sunk in despair, now blown to air with a breath, now raging like a torrent. The human soul is made the sport of fortune, the prey of adversity: it is stretched on the wheel of destiny, in restless ecstasy. The passions are in a state of projection. Years are melted down to moments, and every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process. Thus after Iago has been boasting to himself of the effect of his poisonous suggestions on the mind of Othello, "which, with a little act upon the blood, will work like mines of sulphur," he adds—

"Look where he comes! not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the East,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday."——

And he enters at this moment, like the crested serpent, crowned with his wrongs and raging for revenge! The whole depends upon the turn of a thought. A word, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame; and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano. The dialogues in *Lear*, in *Macbeth*, that between Brutus and Cassius, and nearly all those in Shakspeare, where the interest is wrought up to its highest pitch, afford examples of this dramatic fluctuation of passion. The interest in Chaucer is quite different; it is like the course of a river, strong, and full, and increasing. In Shakspeare, on the contrary, it is like the sea, agitated this way and that, and loud-lashed by furious storms; while in the still pauses of the blast, we distinguish only the cries of despair or the silence of death! Milton, on the other hand, takes the imaginative part of passion—that which remains after the

event, which the mind reposes on when all is over, which looks upon circumstances from the remotest elevation of thought and fancy, and abstracts them from the world of action to that of contemplation. The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by surprise, or force us upon action, "while rage with rage doth sympathise:" the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fill us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight. There are certain objects that strike the imagination, and inspire awe in the very idea of them, independently of any dramatic interest, that is, of any connection with the vicissitudes of human life. For instance, we cannot think of the pyramids of Egypt, of a Gothic ruin, or an old Roman encampment, without a certain emotion, a sense of power and sublimity coming over the mind. The heavenly bodies that hang over our heads wherever we go, and "in their untroubled element shall shine when we are laid in dust, and all our cares forgotten," affect us in the same way. Thus Satan's address to the Sun has an epic, not a dramatic interest; for though the second person in the dialogue makes no answer and feels no concern, yet the eye of that vast luminary is upon him, like the eye of heaven, and seems conscious of what he says, like an universal presence. Dramatic poetry and epic, in their perfection, indeed, approximate to and strengthen one another. Dramatic poetry borrows aid from the dignity of persons and things, as the heroic does from human passion, but in theory they are distinct.—When Richard II. calls for the looking-glass to contemplate his faded majesty in it, and bursts into that affecting exclamation: "Oh, that I were a mockery-king of snow, to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke," we have here the utmost force of

human passion, combined with the ideas of regal splendour and fallen power. When Milton says of Satan:

“—His form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appear'd
Less than archangel ruin'd, and th' excess
Of glory obscur'd;”—

the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret, is perfect.

The great fault of a modern school of poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakespeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with (the Moods of their own Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms. They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry consolation of an unmanly triumph over fallen greatness; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, any thing superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world they look upon with the most perfect indifference; and they are

surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. "With what measure they mete, it has been meted to them again."

Shakspeare's imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. "It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes; or, as Puck says, in boasting of his own feats, "puts a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while describing it; but the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and aptitude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle, and take the fancy prisoner in the same instant. I will mention one or two which are very striking, and not much known, out of *Troilus and Cressida*. *Æneas* says to *Agamemnon*,

"I ask that I may waken reverence,
And on the cheek be ready with a blush
Modest as morning, when she coldly eyes
The youthful *Phœbus*."

Ulysses urging *Achilles* to shew himself in the field, says—

"No man is the lord of any thing,
Till he communicate his parts to others:

Nor doth he of himself know them for aught,
Till he behold them formed in the applause,
Where they're extended! which like an arch reverberates
The voice again, or like a gate of steel,
Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
Its figure and its heat."

Patroclus gives the indolent warrior the same advice.

"Rouse yourself; and the weak wanton Cupid
Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
And like a dew-drop from the lion's mane
Be shook to air."

Shakspeare's language and versification are like the rest of him. He has a magic power over words: they come winged at his bidding; and seem to know their places. They are struck out at a heat, on the spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects. His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination, fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. His language is hieroglyphical. It translates thoughts into visible images. It abounds in sudden transitions and elliptical expressions. This is the source of his mixed metaphors, which are only abbreviated forms of speech. These, however, give no pain from long custom. They have, in fact, become idioms in the language. They are the building, and not the scaffolding to thought. We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan and spell out the particular words and phrases, than the syllables of which they are composed. In trying to recollect any other author, one sometimes stumbles, in case of failure, on a word as good. In Shakspeare, any other word but the true one, is sure to be wrong. If any body, for instance, could not recollect the words of the following description,

“—Light thickens,
And the crow makes wing to the rooky wood,”

he would be greatly at a loss to substitute others for them equally expressive of the feeling. These remarks, however, are strictly applicable only to the impassioned parts of Shakspeare's language, which flowed from the warmth and originality of his imagination, and were his own. The language used for prose conversation and ordinary business is sometimes technical, and involved in the affectation of the time. Compare, for example, Othello's apology to the senate, relating “his whole course of love,” with some of the preceding parts relating to his appointment, and the official dispatches from Cyprus. In this respect, “the business of the state does him offence.”—His versification is no less powerful, sweet, and varied. It has every occasional excellence, of sullen intricacy, crabbed and perplexed, or of the smoothest and loftiest expansion—from the ease and familiarity of measured conversation to the lyrical sounds

“—Of ditties highly penned,
Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower,
With ravishing division to her lute.”

It is the only blank verse in the language, except Milton's, that for itself is readable. It is not stately and uniformly swelling like his, but varied and broken by the inequalities of the ground it has to pass over in its uncertain course,

“And so by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean.”

It remains to speak of the faults of Shakspeare. They are not so many or so great as they have been represented; what there are, are chiefly owing to the following causes:—

The universality of his genius was, perhaps, a disadvantage to his single works; the variety of his resources sometimes diverting him from applying them to the most effectual purposes. He might be said to combine the powers of Æschylus and Aristophanes, of Dante and Rabelais, in his own mind. If he had been only half what he was, he would perhaps have appeared greater. The natural ease and indifference of his temper made him sometimes less scrupulous than he might have been. He is relaxed and careless in critical places; he is in earnest throughout only in *Timon*, *Macbeth*, and *Lear*. Again, he had no models of acknowledged excellence constantly in view to stimulate his efforts, and by all that appears, no love of fame. He wrote for the "great vulgar and the small," in his time, not for posterity. If Queen Elizabeth and the maids of honour laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied, and slept the next night well. He did not trouble himself about Voltaire's criticisms. He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things; and if his plays pleased others, not to quarrel with them himself. His very facility of production would make him set less value on his own excellences, and not care to distinguish nicely between what he did well or ill. His blunders in chronology and geography do not amount to above half a dozen, and they are offences against chronology and geography, not against poetry. As to the unities, he was right in setting them at defiance. He was fonder of puns than became so great a man. His barbarisms were those of his age. His genius was his own. He had no objection to float down with the stream of common taste and opinion: he rose above it by his own buoyancy, and an impulse which he could not keep under, in spite of himself or others, and "his delights did shew most dolphin-like."

He had an equal genius for comedy and tragedy; and his tragedies are better than his comedies, because tragedy is better than comedy. His female characters, which have been found fault with as insipid, are the finest in the world. Lastly, Shakspeare was the least of a coxcomb of any one that ever lived, and much of a gentleman.

IV

THE CHARACTERS OF SHAKSPEARE'S PLAYS

CYMBELINE

CYMBELINE is one of the most delightful of Shakspeare's historical plays. It may be considered as a dramatic romance, in which the most striking parts of the story are thrown into the form of a dialogue, and the intermediate circumstances are explained by the different speakers, as occasion renders necessary. The action is less concentrated in consequence; but the interest becomes more aerial and refined from the principle of perspective introduced into the subject by the imaginary changes of scene, as well as by the length of time it occupies. The reading of this play is like going a journey with some uncertain object at the end of it, and in which the suspense is kept up and heightened by the long intervals between each action. Though the events are scattered over such an extent of surface, and relate to such a variety of characters, yet the links which bind the different interests of the story together are never entirely broken. The most straggling and seemingly casual incidents are contrived in such a manner as to lead at last to the most complete developement of the catastrophe. The ease and conscious unconcern with which this is effected only makes the skill more wonderful. The business of the plot evidently thickens in the last act: the story moves forward with increasing rapidity at every step; its various ramifications are drawn from the most distant points to the same centre; the principal characters are

brought together, and placed in very critical situations; and the fate of almost every person in the drama is made to depend on the solution of a single circumstance—the answer of Iachimo to the question of Imogen respecting the obtaining of the ring from Posthumus. Dr. Johnson is of opinion that Shakspeare was generally inattentive to the winding-up of his plots. We think the contrary is true; and we might cite in proof of this remark not only the present play, but the conclusion of *Lear*, of *Romco and Juliet*, of *Macbeth*, of *Othello*, even of *Hamlet*, and of other plays of less moment, in which the last act is crowded with decisive events brought about by natural and striking means.

The pathos in CYMBELINE is not violent or tragical, but of the most pleasing and amiable kind. A certain tender gloom overspreads the whole. Posthumus is the ostensible hero of the piece, but its greatest charm is the character of Imogen. Posthumus is only interesting from the interest she takes in him; and she is only interesting herself from her tenderness and constancy to her husband. It is the peculiar excellence of Shakspeare's heroines, that they seem to exist only in their attachment to others. They are pure abstractions of the affections. We think as little of their persons as they do themselves, because we are let into the secrets of their hearts, which are more important. We are too much interested in their affairs to stop to look at their faces, except by stealth and at intervals. No one ever hit the true perfection of the female character, the sense of weakness leaning on the strength of its affections for support, so well as Shakspeare—no one ever so well painted natural tenderness free from affectation and disguise—no one else ever so well shewed how delicacy and timidity, when driven to extremity, grow romantic and extravagant; for the romance of his heroines (in which

they abound) is only an excess of the habitual prejudices of their sex, scrupulous of being false to their vows, truant to their affections, and taught by the force of feeling when to forego the forms of propriety for the essence of it. His women were in this respect exquisite logicians; for there is nothing so logical as passion. They knew their own minds exactly; and only followed up a favourite purpose, which they had sworn to with their tongues, and which was engraven on their hearts, into its untoward consequences. They were the prettiest little set of martyrs and confessors on record.—Cibber, in speaking of the early English stage, accounts for the want of prominence and theatrical display in Shakspeare's female characters from the circumstance, that women in those days were not allowed to play the parts of women, which made it necessary to keep them a good deal in the back-ground. Does not this state of manners itself, which prevented their exhibiting themselves in public, and confined them to the relations and charities of domestic life, afford a truer explanation of the matter? His women are certainly very unlike stage-heroines; the reverse of tragedy-queens.

We have almost as great an affection for Imogen as she had for Posthumus; and she deserves it better. Of all Shakspeare's women she is perhaps the most tender and the most artless. Her incredulity in the opening scene with Iachimo, as to her husband's infidelity, is much the same as Desdemona's backwardness to believe Othello's jealousy. Her answer to the most distressing part of the picture is only, "My lord, I fear, has forgot Britain." Her readiness to pardon Iachimo's false imputations and his designs against herself, is a good lesson to prudes; and may shew that where there is a real attachment to virtue, it has no need to bolster itself up with an outrageous or affected antipathy to vice. The scene in which Pisanio

gives Imogen his master's letter, accusing her of incontinency on the treacherous suggestions of Iachimo, is as touching as it is possible for anything to be:—

Pisano. What cheer, Madam?

Imogen. False to his bed! What is it to be false?
To lie in watch there, and to think on him?
To weep 'twixt clock and clock? If sleep charge nature,
To break it with a fearful dream of him,
And cry myself awake? That's false to's bed, is it?

Pisano. Alas, good lady!

Imogen. I false? thy conscience witness, Iachimo,
Thou didst accuse him of incontinency,
Thou then look'dst like a villain: now methinks,
Thy favour's good enough. Some Jay of Italy,
Whose mother was her painting, hath betray'd him:
Poor I am stale, a garment out of fashion,
And for I am richer than to hang by th' walls,
I must be ript; to pieces with me. Oh,
Men's vows are women's traitors. All good seeming
By thy revolt, oh husband, shall be thought
Put on for villainy: not born where't grows,
But worn a bait for ladies.

Pisano. Good Madam, hear me—

Imogen. Talk thy tongue weary, speak:
I have heard I am a strumpet, and mine ear,
Therein false struck, can take no greater wound,
Nor tent to bottom that."—

When Pisano, who had been charged to kill his mistress, puts her in a way to live, she says,

"Why, good fellow,
What shall I do the while? Where bide? How live?
Or in my life what comfort, when I am
Dead to my husband?"

Yet when he advises her to disguise herself in boy's clothes, and suggests "a course pretty and full in view," by which she may "happily be near the residence of Posthumus," she exclaims,

"Oh, for such means,
Though peril to my modesty, not death on't,
I would adventure."

And when Pisanio, enlarging on the consequences, tells her she must change

——"Fear and niceness,
The handmaids of all women, or more truly,
Woman its pretty self, into a waggish courage,
Ready in gibes, quick-answer'd, saucy, and
As quarrellous as the weazel"——

she interrupts him hastily:—

"Nay, be brief;
I see into thy end, and am almost
A man already."

In her journey thus disguised to Milford-Haven, she loses her guide and her way; and unbosoming her complaints, says beautifully—

——"My dear lord,
Thou art one of the false ones; now I think on thee,
My hunger's gone; but even before, I was
At point to sink for food."

She afterwards finds, as she thinks, the dead body of Posthumus, and engages herself as a foot-boy to serve a Roman officer, when she has done all due obsequies to him whom she calls her former master—

——"And when
With wild wood-leaves and weeds I ha' strew'd his grave,
And on it said a century of pray'rs,
Such as I can, twice o'er, I'll weep and sigh,
And leaving so his service, follow you,
So please you entertain me."

Now this is the very religion of love. She all along relies little on her personal charms, which she fears may

have been eclipsed by some painted Jay of Italy; she relies on her merit, and her merit is in the depth of her love, her truth and constancy. Our admiration of her beauty is excited with as little consciousness as possible on her part. There are two delicious descriptions given of her, one when she is asleep, and one when she is supposed dead. Arviragus thus addresses her—

—“With fairest flowers,
While summer lasts, and I live here, Fidele,
I'll sweeten thy sad grave; thou shalt not lack
The flow'r that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor
The azur'd hare-bell, like thy veins, no, nor
The leaf of eglantine, which not to slander,
Out-sweeten'd not thy breath.”

The yellow Iachimo gives another thus, when he steals into her bedchamber:—

—“Cytherea,
How bravely thou becom'st thy bed! Fresh lily,
And whiter than the sheets! That I might touch—
But kiss, one kiss—'Tis her breathing that
Perfumes the chamber thus: the flame o' th' taper
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids
To see th' enclosed lights now canopied
Under the windows, white and azure, laced
With blue of Heav'n's own tinct—on her left breast
A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
I' th' bottom of a cowslip.”

There is a moral sense in the proud beauty of this last image, a rich surfeit of the fancy,—as that well-known passage beginning, “Me of my lawful pleasure she restrained, and prayed me oft forbearance,” sets a keener edge upon it by the inimitable picture of modesty and self-denial.

The character of Cloten, the conceited, booby lord, and rejected lover of Imogen, though not very agreeable in

itself, and at present obsolete, is drawn with much humour and quaint extravagance. The description which Imogen gives of his unwelcome addresses to her—"Whose love-suit hath been to me as fearful as a siege"—is enough to cure the most ridiculous lover of his folly. It is remarkable that though Cloten makes so poor a figure in love, he is described as assuming an air of consequence as the Queen's son in a council of state, and with all the absurdity of his person and manners, is not without shrewdness in his observations. So true is it that folly is as often owing to a want of proper sentiments as to a want of understanding! The exclamation of the ancient critic—Oh Menander and Nature, which of you copied from the other! would not be misapplied to Shakspeare.

The other characters in this play are represented with great truth and accuracy, and as it happens in most of the author's works, there is not only the utmost keeping in each separate character; but in the casting of the different parts, and their relation to one another, there is an affinity and harmony, like what we may observe in the gradations of colour in a picture. The striking and powerful contrasts in which Shakspeare abounds could not escape observation; but the use he makes of the principle of analogy to reconcile the greatest diversities of character and to maintain a continuity of feeling throughout, has not been sufficiently attended to. In *CYMBELINE*, for instance, the principal interest arises out of the unalterable fidelity of Imogen to her husband under the most trying circumstances. Now the other parts of the picture are filled up with subordinate examples of the same feeling, variously modified by different situations, and applied to the purposes of virtue or vice. The plot is aided by the amorous importunities of Cloten, by the persevering determination of Iachimo to conceal the defeat of his project by a daring

imposture: the faithful attachment of Pisanio to his mistress is an affecting accompaniment to the whole; the obstinate adherence to his purpose in Bellarius, who keeps the fate of the young princes so long a secret in resentment for the ungrateful return to his former services, the incorrigible wickedness of the Queen, and even the blind uxorious confidence of Cymbeline, are all so many lines of the same story, tending to the same point. The effect of this coincidence is rather felt than observed; and as the impression exists unconsciously in the mind of the reader, so it probably arose in the same manner in the mind of the author, not from design, but from the force of natural association, a particular train of thought suggesting different inflections of the same predominant feeling, melting into, and strengthening one another, like chords in music.

The characters of Bellarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus, and the romantic scenes in which they appear, are a fine relief to the intrigues and artificial refinements of the court from which they are banished. Nothing can surpass the wildness and simplicity of the descriptions of the mountain life they lead. They follow the business of huntsmen, not of shepherds; and this is in keeping with the spirit of adventure and uncertainty in the rest of the story, and with the scenes in which they are afterwards called on to act. How admirably the youthful fire and impatience to emerge from their obscurity in the young princes is opposed to the cooler calculations and prudent resignation of their more experienced counsellor! How well the disadvantages of knowledge and of ignorance, of solitude and society, are placed against each other!

"Guiderius. Out of your proof you speak: we poor unfledg'd
Have never wing'd from view o' th' nest; nor know not
What air's from home. Haply this life is best,
If quiet life is best; sweeter to you

That have a sharper known; well corresponding
 With your stiff age: but unto us it is
 A cell of ignorance; travelling a-bed,
 A prison for a debtor, that not dares
 To stride a limit.

Arviragus. What should we speak of
 When we are old as you? When we shall hear
 The rain and wind beat dark December! How,
 In this our pinching cave, shall we discourse
 The freezing hours away? We have seen nothing.
 We are beastly; subtle as the fox for prey,
 Like warlike as the wolf for what we eat:
 Our valour is to chase what flies; our cage
 We make a quire, as doth the prison'd bird,
 And sing our bondage freely."

The answer of Bellarius to this expostulation is hardly satisfactory; for nothing can be an answer to hope, or the passion of the mind for unknown good, but experience.—The forest of Arden in *As you like it* can alone compare with the mountain scenes in *CYMBELINE*: yet how different the contemplative quiet of the one from the enterprising boldness and precarious mode of subsistence in the other! Shakspeare not only lets us into the minds of his characters, but gives a tone and colour to the scenes he describes from the feelings of their supposed inhabitants. He at the same time preserves the utmost propriety of action and passion, and gives all their local accompaniments. If he was equal to the greatest things, he was not above an attention to the smallest. Thus the gallant sportsmen in *CYMBELINE* have to encounter the abrupt declivities of hill and valley: Touchstone and Audrey jog along a level path. The deer in *CYMBELINE* are only regarded as objects of prey, "The game's a-foot," etc.—with Jaques they are fine subjects to moralise upon at leisure, "under the shade of melancholy boughs."

We cannot take leave of this play, which is a favourite with us, without noticing some occasional touches of nat-

ural piety and morality. We may allude here to the opening of the scene in which Bellarius instructs the young princes to pay their orisons to heaven :

——“ See, boys! this gate
Instructs you how t' adore the Heav'ns; and bows you
To morning's holy office.
Guiderius. Hail, Heav'n!
Arviragus. Hail, Heav'n!
Bellarious. Now for our mountain-sport, up to yon hill.”

What a grace and unaffected spirit of piety breathes in this passage! In like manner, one of the brothers says to the other, when about to perform the funeral rites to Fidele,

“ Nay, Cadwall, we must lay his head to the east;
My Father hath a reason for't ”—

—as if some allusion to the doctrines of the Christian faith had been casually dropped in conversation by the old man, and had been no farther inquired into.

Shakspeare's morality is introduced in the same simple, unobtrusive manner. Imogen will not let her companions stay away from the chase to attend her when sick, and gives her reason for it—

“ Stick to your journal course; *the breach of custom
Is breach of all!* ”

When the Queen attempts to disguise her motives for procuring the poison from Cornelius, by saying she means to try its effects on “ creatures not worth the hanging,” his answer conveys at once a tacit reproof of her hypocrisy, and a useful lesson of humanity—

——“ Your Highness
Shall from this practice but make hard your heart.”

MACBETH

"The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."

MACBETH and *Lear*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*, are usually reckoned Shakspeare's four principal tragedies. *Lear* stands first for the profound intensity of the passion; *Macbeth* for the wildness of the imagination and the rapidity of the action; *Othello* for the progressive interest and powerful alternations of feeling; *Hamlet* for the refined development of thought and sentiment. If the force of genius shewn in each of these works is astonishing, their variety is not less so. They are like different creations of the same mind, not one of which has the slightest reference to the rest. This distinctness and originality is indeed the necessary consequence of truth and nature. Shakspeare's genius alone appeared to possess the resources of nature. He is "your only *tragedy-maker*." His plays have the force of things upon the mind. What he represents is brought home to the bosom as a part of our experience, implanted in the memory as if we had known the places, persons, and things of which he treats. MACBETH is like a record of a preternatural and tragical event. It has the rugged severity of an old chronicle with all that the imagination of the poet can engraft upon traditional belief. The castle of Macbeth, round which "the air smells wooingly," and where "the temple-haunting martlet builds," has a real subsistence in the mind; the Weird Sisters meet us in person on "the blasted heath;" the "air-drawn dagger" moves slowly before our eyes; the "gracious Dun-

can," the "blood-boulted Banquo" stand before us; all that passed through the mind of Macbeth passes, without the loss of a tittle, through our's. All that could actually take place, and all that is only possible to be conceived, what was said and what was done, the workings of passion, the spells of magic, are brought before us with the same absolute truth and vividness.—Shakspeare excelled in the openings of his plays: that of MACBETH is the most striking of any. The wildness of the scenery, the sudden shifting of the situations and characters, the bustle, the expectations excited, are equally extraordinary. From the first entrance of the Witches and the description of them when they meet Macbeth,

—"What are these
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants of th' earth
And yet are on't?"

the mind is prepared for all that follows.

This tragedy is alike distinguished for the lofty imagination it displays, and for the tumultuous vehemence of the action; and the one is made the moving principle of the other. The overwhelming pressure of preternatural agency urges on the tide of human passion with redoubled force. Macbeth himself appears driven along by the violence of his fate like a vessel drifting before a storm: he reels to and fro like a drunken man; he staggers under the weight of his own purposes and the suggestions of others; he stands at bay with his situation; and from the superstitious awe and breathless suspense into which the communications of the Weird Sisters throw him, is hurried on with daring impatience to verify their predictions, and with impious and bloody hand to tear aside the veil which hides the uncertainty of the future. He is not equal to the struggle with fate and conscience. He now "bends up each corporal

instrument to the terrible feat;" at other times his heart misgives him, and he is cowed and abashed by his success. "The deed, no less than the attempt, confounds him." His mind is assailed by the stings of remorse, and full of "preternatural solicitings." His speeches and soliloquies are dark riddles on human life, baffling solution, and entangling him in their labyrinths. In thought he is absent and perplexed, sudden and desperate in act, from a distrust of his own resolution. His energy springs from the anxiety and agitation of his mind. His blindly rushing forward on the objects of his ambition and revenge, or his recoiling from them, equally betrays the harassed state of his feelings.—This part of his character is admirably set off by being brought in connection with that of Lady Macbeth, whose obdurate strength of will and masculine firmness give her the ascendancy over her husband's faltering virtue. She at once seizes on the opportunity that offers for the accomplishment of all their wished-for greatness, and never flinches from her object till all is over. The magnitude of her resolution almost covers the magnitude of her guilt. She is a great bad woman, whom we hate, but whom we fear more than we hate. She does not excite our loathing and abhorrence like Regan and Gonerill. She is only wicked to gain a great end; and is perhaps more distinguished by her commanding presence of mind and inexorable self-will, which do not suffer her to be diverted from a bad purpose, when once formed, by weak and womanly regrets, than by the hardness of her heart or want of natural affections. The impression which her lofty determination of character makes on the mind of Macbeth is well described where he exclaims,

—"Bring forth men children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males!"

Nor do the pains she is at to "screw his courage to the sticking-place," the reproach to him, not to be "lost so poorly in himself," the assurance that "a little water clears them of this deed," shew anything but her greater consistency in depravity. Her strong-nerved ambition furnishes ribs of steel to "the sides of his intent;" and she is herself wound up to the execution of her baneful project with the same unshrinking fortitude in crime, that in other circumstances she would probably have shewn patience in suffering. The deliberate sacrifice of all other considerations to the gaining "for their future days and nights sole sovereign sway and masterdom," by the murder of Duncan, is gorgeously expressed in her invocation on hearing of "his fatal entrance under her battlements:" —

——"Come all you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here:
And fill me, from the crown to th' toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering-ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night!
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heav'n peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, hold, hold!"——

When she first hears that "Duncan comes there to sleep" she is so overcome by the news, which is beyond her utmost expectations, that she answers the messenger, "Thou'rt mad to say it:" and on receiving her husband's account of the predictions of the Witches, conscious of his instability of purpose, and that her presence is necessary to goad him

on to the consummation of his promised greatness, she exclaims—

—“Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal.”

This swelling exultation and keen spirit of triumph, this uncontrollable eagerness of anticipation, which seems to dilate her form and take possession of all her faculties, this solid, substantial flesh and blood display of passion, exhibit a striking contrast to the cold, abstracted, gratuitous, servile malignity of the Witches, who are equally instrumental in urging Macbeth to his fate for the mere love of mischief, and from a disinterested delight in deformity and cruelty. They are hags of mischief, obscene panders to iniquity, malicious from their impotence of enjoyment, enamoured of destruction, because they are themselves unreal, abortive, half-existences—who become sublime from their exemption from all human sympathies and contempt for all human affairs, as Lady Macbeth does by the force of passion! Her fault seems to have been an excess of that strong principle of self-interest and family aggrandisement, not amenable to the common feelings of compassion and justice, which is so marked a feature in barbarous nations and times. A passing reflection of this kind, on the resemblance of the sleeping king to her father, alone prevents her from slaying Duncan with her own hand.

In speaking of the character of Lady Macbeth, we ought not to pass over Mrs. Siddons's manner of acting that part. We can conceive of nothing grander. It was something above nature. It seemed almost as if a being of a superior order had dropped from a higher sphere to awe the world

with the majesty of her appearance. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine; she was tragedy personified. In coming on in the sleeping-scene, her eyes were open, but their sense was shut. She was like a person bewildered and unconscious of what she did. Her lips moved involuntarily—all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical. She glided on and off the stage like an apparition. To have seen her in that character was an event in every one's life, not to be forgotten.

The dramatic beauty of the character of Duncan, which excites the respect and pity even of his murderers, has been often pointed out. It forms a picture of itself. An instance of the author's power of giving a striking effect to a common reflection, by the manner of introducing it, occurs in a speech of Duncan, complaining of his having been deceived in his opinion of the Thane of Cawdor, at the very moment that he is expressing the most unbounded confidence in the loyalty and services of Macbeth.

"There is no art
To find the mind's construction in the face:
He was a gentleman, on whom I built
An absolute trust.
O worthiest cousin, (*addressing himself to Macbeth.*)
The sin of my Ingratitude e'en now
Was great upon me," etc.

Another passage to shew that Shakspeare lost sight of nothing that could in any way give relief or heightening to his subject, is the conversation which takes place between Banquo and Fleance immediately before the murder-scene of Duncan.

"*Banquo.* How goes the night, boy?
Fleance. The moon is down: I have not heard the clock.
Banquo. And she goes down at twelve.
Fleance. I take't, 'tis later, Sir.

Banquo. Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heav'n,
Their candles are all out.—
A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep: Merciful Powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose."

In like manner, a fine idea is given of the gloomy coming on of evening, just as Banquo is going to be assassinated.

"Light thickens and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood."

"Now spurs the lated traveller apace
To gain the timely inn."

MACBETH (generally speaking) is done upon a stronger and more systematic principle of contrast than any other of Shakspeare's plays. It moves upon the verge of an abyss, and is a constant struggle between life and death. The action is desperate and the reaction is dreadful. It is a huddling together of fierce extremes, a war of opposite natures which of them shall destroy the other. There is nothing but what has a violent end or violent beginnings. The lights and shades are laid on with a determined hand; the transitions from triumph to despair, from the height of terror to the repose of death, are sudden and startling; every passion brings in its fellow-contrary, and the thoughts pitch and jostle against each other as in the dark. The whole play is an unruly chaos of strange and forbidden things, where the ground rocks under our feet. Shakspeare's genius here took its full swing, and trod upon the farthest bounds of nature and passion. This circumstance will account for the abruptness and violent antitheses of the style, the throes and labour which run through the expression, and from defects will turn them into beauties. "So

fair and foul a day I have not seen," etc. "Such welcome and unwelcome news together." "Men's lives are like the flowers in their caps, dying or ere they sicken." "Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it." The scene before the castle-gate follows the appearance of the Witches on the heath, and is followed by a midnight murder. Duncan is cut off betimes by treason leagued with witchcraft, and Macduff is ripped untimely from his mother's womb to avenge his death. Macbeth, after the death of Banquo, wishes for his presence in extravagant terms, "To him and all we thirst," and when his ghost appears, cries out, "Avaunt and quit my sight," and being gone, he is "himself again." Macbeth resolves to get rid of Macduff, that "he may sleep in spite of thunder;" and cheers his wife on the doubtful intelligence of Banquo's taking-off with the encouragement—"Then be thou jocund: ere the bat has flown his cloistered flight; ere to black Hecate's summons the shard-born beetle has rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done—a deed of dreadful note." In Lady Macbeth's speech "Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done 't," there is murder and filial piety together; and in urging him to fulfil his vengeance against the defenceless king, her thoughts spare the blood neither of infants nor old age. The description of the Witches is full of the same contradictory principle; they "rejoice when good kings bleed," they are neither of the earth nor the air, but both; they "should be women, but their beards forbid it;" they take all the pains possible to lead Macbeth on to the height of his ambition, only to betray him "in deeper consequence," and after showing him all the pomp of their art, discover their malignant delight in his disappointed hopes, by that bitter taunt, "Why stands Macbeth thus amazedly?" We might multiply such instances every where.

The leading features in the character of Macbeth are striking enough, and they form what may be thought at first only a bold, rude, Gothic outline. By comparing it with other characters of the same author we shall perceive the absolute truth and identity which is observed in the midst of the giddy whirl and rapid career of events. Macbeth in Shakspeare no more loses his identity of character in the fluctuations of fortune or the storm of passion, than Macbeth in himself would have lost the identity of his person. Thus he is as distinct a being from Richard III. as it is possible to imagine, though these two characters in common hands, and indeed in the hands of any other poet, would have been a repetition of the same general idea, more or less exaggerated. For both are tyrants, usurpers, murderers, both aspiring and ambitious, both courageous, cruel, treacherous. But Richard is cruel from nature and constitution. Macbeth becomes so from accidental circumstances. Richard is from his birth deformed in body and mind, and naturally incapable of good. Macbeth is full of "the milk of human kindness," is frank, sociable, generous. He is tempted to the commission of guilt by golden opportunities, by the instigations of his wife, and by prophetic warnings. Fate and metaphysical aid conspire against his virtue and his loyalty. Richard on the contrary needs no prompter, but wades through a series of crimes to the height of his ambition from the ungovernable violence of his temper and a reckless love of mischief. He is never gay but in the prospect or in the success of his villainies: Macbeth is full of horror at the thoughts of the murder of Duncan, which he is with difficulty prevailed on to commit, and of remorse after its perpetration. Richard has no mixture of common humanity in his composition, no regard to kindred or posterity, he owns no fellowship with others, he is "himself alone." Macbeth is not destitute of feelings of sympathy,

is accessible to pity, is even made in some measure the dupe of his uxoriousness, ranks the loss of friends, of the cordial love of his followers, and of his good name, among the causes which have made him weary of life, and regrets that he has ever seized the crown by unjust means, since he cannot transmit it to his posterity—

“For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind—
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings.”

In the agitation of his mind, he envies those whom he has sent to peace. “Duncan is in his grave; after life's fitful fever he sleeps well.”—It is true, he becomes more callous as he plunges deeper in guilt, “direness is thus rendered familiar to his slaughterous thoughts,” and he in the end anticipates his wife in the boldness and bloodiness of his enterprises, while she for want of the same stimulus of action, “is troubled with thick-coming fancies that rob her of her rest,” goes mad and dies. Macbeth endeavours to escape from reflection on his crimes by repelling their consequences, and banishes remorse for the past by the meditation of future mischief. This is not the principle of Richard's cruelty, which displays the wanton malice of a fiend as much as the frailty of human passion. Macbeth is goaded on to acts of violence and retaliation by necessity; to Richard, blood is a pastime.—There are other decisive differences inherent in the two characters. Richard may be regarded as a man of the world, a plotting, hardened knave, wholly regardless of everything but his own ends, and the means to secure them.—Not so Macbeth. The superstitions of the age, the rude state of society, the local scenery and customs, all give a wildness and imaginary grandeur to his character. From the strangeness of the events that surround him, he is full of amazement and fear;

and stands in doubt between the world of reality and the world of fancy. He sees sights not shewn to mortal eye, and hears unearthly music. All is tumult and disorder within and without his mind; his purposes recoil upon himself, are broken and disjointed; he is the double thrall of his passions and his evil destiny. Richard is not a character either of imagination or pathos, but of pure self-will. There is no conflict of opposite feelings in his breast. The apparitions which he sees only haunt him in his sleep; nor does he live like Macbeth in a waking dream. Macbeth has considerable energy and manliness of character; but then he is "subject to all the skyey influences." He is sure of nothing but the present moment. Richard in the busy turbulence of his projects never loses his self-possession, and makes use of every circumstance that happens as an instrument of his long-reaching designs. In his last extremity we can only regard him as a wild beast taken in the toils: while we never entirely lose our concern for Macbeth; and he calls back all our sympathy by that fine close of thoughtful melancholy,

"My way of life is fallen into the sear,
The yellow leaf; and that which should accompany old age,
As honour, troops of friends, I must not look to have;
But in their stead, curses not loud but deep,
Mouth-honour, breath, which the poor heart
Would fain deny, and dare not."

We can conceive a common actor to play Richard tolerably well; we can conceive no one to play Macbeth properly, or to look like a man that had encountered the Weird Sisters. All the actors that we have ever seen, appear as if they had encountered them on the boards of Covent-garden or Drury-lane, but not on the heath at Fores, and as if they did not believe what they had seen. The Witches of *MACBETH* indeed are ridiculous on the modern stage,

and we doubt if the Furies of Æschylus would be more respected. The progress of manners and knowledge has an influence on the stage, and will in time perhaps destroy both tragedy and comedy. Filch's picking pockets in the *Beggar's Opera* is not so good a jest as it used to be: by the force of the police and of philosophy, Lillo's murders and the ghosts in Shakspeare will become obsolete. At last, there will be nothing left, good nor bad, to be desired or dreaded, on the theatre or in real life.—A question has been started with respect to the originality of Shakspeare's witches, which has been well answered by Mr. Lamb in his notes to the "Specimens of Early Dramatic Poetry."

"Though some resemblance may be traced between the charms in *MACBETH*, and the incantations in this play, (The Witch of Middleton) which is supposed to have preceded it, this coincidence will not detract much from the originality of Shakspeare. His Witches are distinguished from the Witches of Middleton by essential differences. These are creatures to whom man or woman plotting some dire mischief might resort for occasional consultation. Those originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first meet with Macbeth's, he is spell-bound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination. These Witches can hurt the body; those have power over the soul.—Hecate in Middleton has a son, a low buffoon: the hags of Shakspeare have neither child of their own, nor seem to be descended from any parent. They are foul anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung, nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with thunder and lightning, and vanish to airy music. This is all we know of them.—Except Hecate, they have no names, which heightens their mysteriousness. The names, and some of the properties which Middleton has given to his hags, excite smiles. The Weird Sisters are serious things. Their presence cannot co-exist with mirth. But, in a lesser degree, the Witches of Middleton are fine creations. Their power too is, in some measure, over the mind. They raise jars, jealousies, strifes, *like a thick scurf o'er life.*"

IAGO

The character of Iago is one of the supererogations of Shakspeare's genius. Some persons, more nice than wise, have thought this whole character unnatural, because his villainy is *without a sufficient motive*. Shakspeare, who was as good a philosopher as he was a poet, thought otherwise. He knew that the love of power, which is another name for the love of mischief, is natural to man. He would know this as well or better than if it had been demonstrated to him by a logical diagram, merely from seeing children paddle in the dirt or kill flies for sport. Iago in fact belongs to a class of character, common to Shakspeare and at the same time peculiar to him; whose heads are as acute and active as their hearts are hard and callous. Iago is to be sure an extreme instance of the kind; that is to say, of diseased intellectual activity, with the most perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or rather with a decided preference of the latter, because it falls more readily in with his favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts and scope to his actions. He is quite or nearly as indifferent to his own fate as to that of others; he runs all risks for a trifling and doubtful advantage; and is himself the dupe and victim of his ruling passion—an insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous kind. "Our ancient" is a philosopher, who fancies that a lie that kills has more point in it than an alliteration or an antithesis; who thinks a fatal experiment on the peace of a family a better thing than watching the palpitations in the heart of a flea in a microscope; who plots the ruin of his friends as an exercise for his ingenuity, and stabs men in the dark to prevent *ennui*. His gaiety, such as it is, arises from the success of his treachery; his ease from the torture he has inflicted on others. He is an amateur of tragedy in real life; and

instead of employing his invention on imaginary characters. or long-forgotten incidents, he takes the bolder and more desperate course of getting up his plot at home, casts the principal parts among his nearest friends and connections, and rehearses it in downright earnest, with steady nerves and unabated resolution. We will just give an illustration or two.

One of his most characteristic speeches is that immediately after the marriage of Othello.

"Roderigo. What a full fortune does the thick lips owe,
If he can carry her thus!

Iago. Call up her father:

Rouse him (*Othello*) make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen,
And tho' he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies: tho' that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on it,
As it may lose some colour."

In the next passage, his imagination runs riot in the mischief he is plotting, and breaks out into the wildness and impetuosity of real enthusiasm.

"Roderigo. Here is her father's house: I'll call aloud.

Iago. Do, with like timourous accent and dire yell
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities."

One of his most favourite topics, on which he is rich indeed, and in descanting on which his spleen serves him for a Muse, is the disproportionate match between Desdemona and the Moor. This is a clue to the character of the lady which he is by no means ready to part with. It is brought forward in the first scene, and he recurs to it, when in answer to his insinuations against Desdemona, Roderigo says,

"I cannot believe that in her—she's full of most blest conditions.
Iago. Bless'd fig's end. The wine she drinks is made of grapes.
 If she had been blest, she would never have married the Moor."

And again with still more spirit and fatal effect afterwards, when he turns this very suggestion arising in Othello's own breast to her prejudice.

"*Othello.* And yet how nature erring from itself—
Iago. Ay, there's the point;—as to be bold with you,
 Not to affect many proposed matches
 Of her own clime, complexion, and degree," etc.

This is probing to the quick. Iago here turns the character of poor Desdemona, as it were, inside out. It is certain that nothing but the genius of Shakspeare could have preserved the entire interest and delicacy of the part, and have even drawn an additional elegance and dignity from the peculiar circumstances in which she is placed.—The habitual licentiousness of Iago's conversation is not to be traced to the pleasure he takes in gross or lascivious images, but to his desire of finding out the worst side of everything, and of proving himself an over-match for appearances. He has none of "the milk of human kindness" in his composition. His imagination rejects everything that has not a strong infusion of the most unpalatable ingredients; his mind digests only poisons. Virtue or goodness or whatever has the least "relish of salvation in it," is, to his depraved appetite, sickly and insipid: and he even resents the good opinion entertained of his own integrity, as if it were an affront cast on the masculine sense and spirit of his character. Thus at the meeting between Othello and Desdemona, he exclaims—"Oh, you are well tuned now: but I'll set down the pegs that make this music, *as honest as I am*"—his character of *bonhomme* not sitting at all easy upon him. In the scenes, where he tries to work Othello

to his purpose, he is proportionably guarded, insidious, dark, and deliberate. We believe nothing ever came up to the profound dissimulation and dextrous artifice of the well-known dialogue in the third act, where he first enters upon the execution of his design.

Iago. My noble lord.

Othello. What dost thou say, Iago?

Iago. Did Michael Cassio,

When you woo'd my lady, know of your love?

Othello. He did from first to last.

Why dost thou ask?

Iago. But for a satisfaction of my thought,

No further harm.

Othello. Why of thy thought, Iago?

Iago. I did not think he had been acquainted with it.

Othello. O yes, and went between us very oft—

Iago. Indeed!

Othello. Indeed? Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught of that?

Is he not honest?

Iago. Honest, my lord?

Othello. Honest? Ay, honest.

Iago. My lord, for aught I know.

Othello. What do'st thou think?

Iago. Think, my lord!

Othello. Think, my lord! Alas, thou echo'st me,

As if there was some monster in thy thought

Too hideous to be shewn."—

The stops and breaks, the deep workings of treachery under the mask of love and honesty, the anxious watchfulness, the cool earnestness, and if we may so say, the *passion* of hypocrisy, marked in every line, receive their last finishing in that inconceivable burst of pretended indignation at Othello's doubts of his sincerity.

"O grace! O Heaven forgive me!

Are you a man? Have you a soul or sense?

God be wi' you; take mine office. O wretched fool,

That lov'st to make thine honesty a vice!

Oh monstrous world! Take note, take note, O world!

To be direct and honest, is not safe.

I thank you for this profit, and from hence
I'll love no friend, since love breeds such offence."

If Iago is detestable enough when he has business on his hands and all his engines at work, he is still worse when he has nothing to do, and we only see into the hollowness of his heart. His indifference when Othello falls into a swoon, is perfectly diabolical.

Iago. How is it, General? Have you not hurt your head?
Othello. Do'st thou mock me?
Iago. I mock you not, by Heaven," etc.

The part indeed would hardly be tolerated, even as a foil to the virtue and generosity of the other characters in the play, but for its indefatigable industry and inexhaustible resources, which divert the attention of the spectator (as well as his own) from the end he has in view to the means by which it must be accomplished.—Edmund the Bastard in *Lear* is something of the same character, placed in less prominent circumstances. Zanga is a vulgar caricature of it.

HAMLET

This is that Hamlet the Dane, whom we read of in our youth, and whom we may be said almost to remember in our after-years; he who made that famous soliloquy on life, who gave the advice to the players, who thought "this goodly frame, the earth, a steril promontory, and this brave o'er-hanging firmament, the air, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours;" whom "man delighted not, nor woman neither;" he who talked with the grave-diggers, and moralised on Yorick's skull; the school-fellow of Rosencrans and

Guikdenstern at Wittenberg; the friend of Horatio; the lover of Ophelia; he that was mad and sent to England; the slow avenger of his father's death; who lived at the court of Horwendillus five hundred years before we were born, but all whose thoughts we seem to know as well as we do our own, because we have read them in Shakspeare.

Hamlet is a name; his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet's brain. What then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet. This play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history. Whoever has become thoughtful and melancholy through his own mishaps or those of others; whoever has borne about with him the clouded brow of reflection, and thought himself "too much i' th' sun;" whoever has seen the golden lamp of day dimmed by envious mists rising in his own breast, and could find in the world before him only a dull blank with nothing left remarkable in it; whoever has known "the pangs of despised love, the insolence of office, or the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes;" he who has felt his mind sink within him, and sadness cling to his heart like a malady, who has had his hopes blighted and his youth staggered by the apparitions of strange things; who cannot be well at ease, while he sees evil hovering near him like a spectre; whose powers of action have been eaten up by thought, he to whom the universe seems infinite, and himself nothing; whose bitterness of soul makes him careless of consequences, and who goes to a play as his best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of life by a mock representation of them—this is the true Hamlet.

We have been so used to this tragedy that we hardly know how to criticise it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces. But we must make such

observations as we can. It is the one of Shakspeare's plays that we think of the oftenest, because it abounds most in striking reflections on human life, and because the distresses of Hamlet are transferred, by the turn of his mind, to the general account of humanity. Whatever happens to him we apply to ourselves, because he applies it so himself as a means of general reasoning. He is a great moraliser; and what makes him worth attending to is, that he moralises on his own feelings and experience. He is not a common-place pedant. If *Lear* is distinguished by the greatest depth of passion, HAMLET is the most remarkable for the ingenuity, originality, and unstudied developement of character. Shakspeare had more magnanimity than any other poet, and he has shewn more of it in this play than in any other. There is no attempt to force an interest: everything is left for time and circumstances to unfold. The attention is excited without effort, the incidents succeed each other as matters of course, the characters think and speak and act just as they might do, if left entirely to themselves. There is no set purpose, no straining at a point. The observations are suggested by the passing scene—the gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. The whole play is an exact transcript of what might be supposed to have taken place at the court of Denmark, at the remote period of time fixed upon, before the modern refinements in morals and manners were heard of. It would have been interesting enough to have been admitted as a by-stander in such a scene, at such a time, to have heard and witnessed something of what was going on. But here we are more than spectators. We have not only “the outward pageants and the signs of grief;” but “we have that within which passes shew.” We read the thoughts of the heart, we catch the passions living as they rise. Other dramatic writers give us very

fine versions and paraphrases of nature; but Shakspeare, together with his own comments, gives us the original text, that we may judge for ourselves. This is a very great advantage.

The character of Hamlet stands quite by itself. It is not a character marked by strength of will or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment. Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can well be: but he is a young and princely novice, full of high enthusiasm and quick sensibility—the sport of circumstances, questioning with fortune and refining on his own feelings, and forced from the natural bias of his disposition by the strangeness of his situation. He seems incapable of deliberate action, and is only hurried into extremities on the spur of the occasion, when he has no time to reflect, as in the scene where he kills Polonius, and again, where he alters the letters which Rosencrans and Guildenstern are taking with them to England, purporting his death. At other times, when he is most bound to act, he remains puzzled, undecided, and sceptical, dallies with his purposes, till the occasion is lost, and finds out some pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtfulness again. For this reason he refuses to kill the King when he is at his prayers, and by a refinement in malice, which is in truth only an excuse for his own want of resolution, defers his revenge to a more fatal opportunity, when he shall be engaged in some act “that has no relish of salvation in it.”

“He kneels and prays,
And now I'll do't, and so he goes to heaven,
And so am I reveng'd: *that would be scann'd.*
He kill'd my father, and for that,
I, his sole son, send him to heaven.
Why this is reward, not revenge.
Up sword and know thou a more horrid time,
When he is drunk, asleep, or in a rage.”

He is the prince of philosophical speculators; and because he cannot have his revenge perfect, according to the most refined idea his wish can form, he declines it altogether. So he scruples to trust the suggestions of the ghost, contrives the scene of the play to have surer proof of his uncle's guilt, and then rests satisfied with this confirmation of his suspicions, and the success of his experiment, instead of acting upon it. Yet he is sensible of his own weakness, taxes himself with it, and tries to reason himself out of it.

"How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast; no more.
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To rust in us unus'd. Now whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th' event,—
A thought which quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom,
And ever three parts coward;—I do not know
Why yet I live to say, this thing's to do;
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do it. Examples gross as earth exhort me:
Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd,
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell. 'Tis not to be great
Never to stir without great argument;
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,

Which is not tomb enough and continent
 To hide the slain?—O, from this time forth,
 My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth."

Still he does nothing; and this very speculation on his own infirmity only affords him another occasion for indulging it. It is not from any want of attachment to his father or of abhorrence of his murder that Hamlet is thus dilatory, but it is more to his taste to indulge his imagination in reflecting upon the enormity of the crime and refining on his schemes of vengeance, than to put them into immediate practice. His ruling passion is to think, not to act: and any vague pretext that flatters this propensity instantly diverts him from his previous purposes.

The moral perfection of this character has been called in question, we think, by those who did not understand it. It is more interesting than according to rules; amiable, though not faultless. The ethical delineations of "that noble and liberal casuist" (as Shakspeare has been well called) do not exhibit the drab-coloured quakerism of morality. His plays are not copied either from *The Whole Duty of Man*, or from *The Academy of Compliments*! We confess we are a little shocked at the want of refinement in those who are shocked at the want of refinement in Hamlet. The neglect of punctilious exactness in his behaviour either partakes of the "licence of the time," or else belongs to the very excess of intellectual refinement in the character, which makes the common rules of life, as well as his own purposes, sit loose upon him. He may be said to be amenable only to the tribunal of his own thoughts, and is too much taken up with the airy world of contemplation to lay as much stress as he ought on the practical consequences of things. His habitual principles of action are unhinged and out of joint with the time. His conduct to Ophelia is quite natural in his circumstances. It is that of assumed

severity only. It is the effect of disappointed hope, of bitter regrets, of affection suspended, not obliterated, by the distractions of the scene around him! Amidst the natural and preternatural horrors of his situation, he might be excused in delicacy from carrying on a regular courtship. When "his father's spirit was in arms," it was not a time for the son to make love in. He could neither marry Ophelia, nor wound her mind by explaining the cause of his alienation, which he durst hardly trust himself to think of. It would have taken him years to have come to a direct explanation on the point. In the harassed state of his mind, he could not have done much otherwise than he did. His conduct does not contradict what he says when he sees her funeral,

"I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum."

Nothing can be more affecting or beautiful than the Queen's apostrophe to Ophelia on throwing the flowers into the grave.

—"Sweets to the sweet, farewell.
I hop'd thou should'st have been my Hamlet's wife:
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd thy grave."

Shakspeare was thoroughly a master of the mixed motives of human character, and he here shews us the Queen, who was so criminal in some respects, not without sensibility and affection in other relations of life.—Ophelia is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. Oh rose of May, oh flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos. It is a character which

nobody but Shakspeare could have drawn in the way that he has done, and to the conception of which there is not even the smallest approach, except in some of the old romantic ballads.* Her brother, Laertes, is a character we do not like so well: he is too hot and choleric, and somewhat rhodomontade. Polonius is a perfect character in its kind; nor is there any foundation for the objections which have been made to the consistency of this part. It is said that he acts very foolishly and talks very sensibly. There is no inconsistency in that. Again, that he talks wisely at one time and foolishly at another; that his advice to Laertes is very excellent, and his advice to the King and Queen on the subject of Hamlet's madness very ridiculous. But he gives the one as a father, and is sincere in it; he gives the other as a mere courtier, a busy-body, and is accordingly officious, garrulous, and impertinent. In short, Shakspeare has been accused of inconsistency in this and other characters, only because he has kept up the distinction which there is in nature, between the understandings and the moral habits of men, between the absurdity of their ideas and the absurdity of their motives. Polonius is not a fool, but he makes himself so. His folly, whether in his actions or speeches, comes under the head of impropriety of intention.

We do not like to see our author's plays acted, and least of all, HAMLET. There is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage. Hamlet himself seems hardly

* In the account of her death, a friend has pointed out an instance of the poet's exact observation of nature:—

“There is a willow growing o'er a brook,
That shews its hoary leaves i' th' glassy stream.”

The inside of the leaves of the willow, next the water, is of a whitish colour, and the reflection would therefore be “hoary.”

capable of being acted. Mr. Kemble unavoidably fails in this character from a want of ease and variety. The character of Hamlet is made up of undulating lines; it has the yielding flexibility of "a wave o' th' sea." Mr. Kemble plays it like a man in armour, with a determined inveteracy of purpose, in one undeviating straight line, which is as remote from the natural grace and refined susceptibility of the character, as the sharp angles and abrupt starts which Mr. Kean introduces into the part. Mr. Kean's Hamlet is as much too splenetic and rash as Mr. Kemble's is too deliberate and formal. His manner is too strong and pointed. He throws a severity, approaching to virulence, into the common observations and answers. There is nothing of this in Hamlet. He is, as it were, wrapped up in his reflections, and only *thinks aloud*. There should therefore be no attempt to impress what he says upon others by a studied exaggeration of emphasis or manner; no *talk-ing at* his hearers. There should be as much of the gentleman and scholar as possible infused into the part, and as little of the actor. A pensive air of sadness should sit reluctantly upon his brow, but no appearance of fixed and sullen gloom. He is full of weakness and melancholy, but there is no harshness in his nature. He is the most amiable of misanthropes.

ROMEO AND JULIET

ROMEO AND JULIET is the only tragedy which Shakspeare has written entirely on a love-story. It is supposed to have been his first play, and it deserves to stand in that proud rank. There is the buoyant spirit of youth in every line, in the rapturous intoxication of hope, and in the bitterness of despair. It has been said of ROMEO AND JULIET by a great critic, that "whatever is most intoxicating in the

odour of a southern spring, languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous in the first opening of the rose, is to be found in this poem." The description is true; and yet it does not answer to our idea of the play. For if it has the sweetness of the rose, it has its freshness too; if it has the languor of the nightingale's song, it has also its giddy transport; if it has the softness of a southern spring, it is as glowing and as bright. There is nothing of a sickly and sentimental cast. Romeo and Juliet are in love, but they are not love-sick. Everything speaks the very soul of pleasure, the high and healthy pulse of the passions: the heart beats, the blood circulates and mantles throughout. Their courtship is not an insipid interchange of sentiments lip-deep, learnt at second-hand from poems and plays,—made up of beauties of the most shadowy kind, of "fancies wan that hang the pensive head," of evanescent smiles, and sighs that breathe not, of delicacy that shrinks from the touch, and feebleness that scarce supports itself, an elaborate vacuity of thought, and an artificial dearth of sense, spirit, truth, and nature! It is the reverse of all this. It is Shakspeare all over, and Shakspeare when he was young.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, is the leader of the fairy band. He is the Ariel of the MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM; and yet as unlike as can be to the Ariel in the *Tempest*. No other poet could have made two such different characters out of the same fanciful materials and situations. Ariel is a minister of retribution, who is touched with the sense of pity at the woes he inflicts. Puck is a mad-cap sprite, full of wantonness and mischief, who laughs at those whom he misleads—"Lord, what fools

these mortals be!" Ariel cleaves the air, and executes his mission with the zeal of a winged messenger; Puck is borne along on his fairy errand like the light and glittering gossamer before the breeze. He is, indeed, a most Epicurean little gentleman, dealing in quaint devices, and faring in dainty delights. Prospero and his world of spirits are a set of moralists: but with Oberon and his fairies we are launched at once into the empire of the butterflies. How beautifully is this race of beings contrasted with the men and women actors in the scene, by a single epithet which Titania gives to the latter, "the human mortals"! It is astonishing that Shakspeare should be considered, not only by foreigners, but by many of our own critics, as a gloomy and heavy writer, who painted nothing but "gorgons and hydras, and chimeras dire." His subtlety exceeds that of all other dramatic writers, insomuch that a celebrated person of the present day said that he regarded him rather as a metaphysician than a poet. His delicacy and sportive gaiety are infinite. In the MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM alone, we should imagine, there is more sweetness and beauty of description than in the whole range of French poetry put together. What we mean is this, that we will produce out of that single play ten passages, to which we do not think any ten passages in the works of the French poets can be opposed, displaying equal fancy and imagery. Shall we mention the remonstrance of Helena to Hermia, or Titania's description of her fairy train, or her disputes with Oberon about the Indian boy, or Puck's account of himself and his employments, or the Fairy Queen's exhortation to the elves to pay due attendance upon her favourite, Bottom; or Hippolita's description of a chase, or Theseus's answer? The two last are as heroical and spirited as the others are full of luscious tenderness. The reading of this play is like wandering in a grove by moonlight: the de-

scriptions breathe a sweetness like odours thrown from beds of flowers. . . .

The MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, when acted, is converted from a delightful fiction into a dull pantomime. All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation. The spectacle was grand; but the spirit was evaporated, the genius was fled.—Poetry and the stage do not agree well together. The attempt to reconcile them in this instance fails not only of effect, but of decorum. The *ideal* can have no place upon the stage, which is a picture without perspective: everything there is in the fore-ground. That which was merely an airy shape, a dream, a passing thought, immediately becomes an unmanageable reality. Where all is left to the imagination (as is the case in reading) every circumstance, near or remote, has an equal chance of being kept in mind, and tells accordingly to the mixed impression of all that has been suggested. But the imagination cannot sufficiently qualify the actual impressions of the senses. Any offence given to the eye is not to be got rid of by explanation. Thus Bottom's head in the play is a fantastic illusion, produced by magic spells: on the stage it is an ass's head, and nothing more; certainly a very strange costume for a gentleman to appear in. Fancy cannot be embodied any more than a simile can be painted; and it is as idle to attempt it as to personate *H'all* or *Moonshine*. Fairies are not incredible, but fairies six feet high are so. Monsters are not shocking, if they are seen at a proper distance. When ghosts appear at mid-day, when apparitions stalk along Cheapside, then may the MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM be represented without injury at Covent-garden or at Drury-lane. The boards of a theatre and the regions of fancy are not the same thing.

FALSTAFF

If Shakspeare's fondness for the ludicrous sometimes led to faults in his tragedies (which was not often the case) he has made us amends by the character of Falstaff. This is perhaps the most substantial comic character that ever was invented. Sir John carries a most portly presence in the mind's eye; and in him, not to speak it profanely, "we behold the fulness of the spirit of wit and humour bodily." We are as well acquainted with his person as his mind, and his jokes come upon us with double force and relish from the quantity of flesh through which they make their way, as he shakes his fat sides with laughter, or "lards the lean earth as he walks along." Other comic characters seem, if we approach and handle them, to resolve themselves into air, "into thin air;" but this is embodied and palpable to the grossest apprehension: it lies "three fingers deep upon the ribs," it plays about the lungs and the diaphragm with all the force of animal enjoyment. His body is like a good estate to his mind, from which he receives rents and revenues of profit and pleasure in kind, according to its extent, and the richness of the soil. Wit is often a meagre substitute for pleasurable sensation; an effusion of spleen and petty spite at the comforts of others, from feeling none in itself. Falstaff's wit is an emanation of a fine constitution; an exuberance of good-humour and good-nature; an overflowing of his love of laughter and good-fellowship; a giving vent to his heart's ease, and over-contentment with himself and others. He would not be in character, if he were not so fat as he is; for there is the greatest keeping in the boundless luxury of his imagination and the pampered self-indulgence of his physical appetites. He manures and nourishes his mind with jests, as he does his body with sack and sugar. He carves out

his jokes, as he would a capon or a haunch of venison, where there is *cut and come again*; and pours out upon them the oil of gladness. His tongue drops fatness, and in the chambers of his brain "it snows of meat and drink." He keeps up perpetual holiday and open house, and we live with him in a round of invitations to a rump and dozen.—Yet we are not to suppose that he was a mere sensualist. All this is as much in imagination as in reality. His sensuality does not engross and stupify his other faculties, but "ascends me into the brain, clears away all the dull, crude vapours that environ it, and makes it full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes." His imagination keeps up the ball after his senses have done with it. He seems to have even a greater enjoyment of the freedom from restraint, of good cheer, of his ease, of his vanity, in the ideal exaggerated description which he gives of them, than in fact. He never fails to enrich his discourse with allusions to eating and drinking, but we never see him at table. He carries his own larder about with him, and he is himself "a tun of man." His pulling out the bottle in the field of battle is a joke to shew his contempt for glory accompanied with danger, his systematic adherence to his Epicurean philosophy in the most trying circumstances. Again, such is his deliberate exaggeration of his own vices, that it does not seem quite certain whether the account of his hostess's bill, found in his pocket, with such an out-of-the-way charge for capons and sack with only one halfpenny-worth of bread, was not put there by himself as a trick to humour the jest upon his favourite propensities, and as a conscious caricature of himself. He is represented as a liar, a braggart, a coward, a glutton, etc. and yet we are not offended but delighted with him; for he is all these as much to amuse others as to gratify himself. He openly assumes all these characters to shew

the humourous part of them. The unrestrained indulgence of his own ease, appetites, and convenience, has neither malice nor hypocrisy in it. In a word, he is an actor in himself almost as much as upon the stage, and we no more object to the character of Falstaff in a moral point of view than we should think of bringing an excellent comedian, who should represent him to the life, before one of the police offices. We only consider the number of pleasant lights in which he puts certain foibles (the more pleasant as they are opposed to the received rules and necessary restraints of society) and do not trouble ourselves about the consequences resulting from them, for no mischievous consequences do result. Sir John is old as well as fat, which gives a melancholy retrospective tinge to the character; and by the disparity between his inclinations and his capacity for enjoyment, makes it still more ludicrous and fantastical.

The secret of Falstaff's wit is for the most part a masterly presence of mind, an absolute self-possession, which nothing can disturb. His repartees are involuntary suggestions of his self-love; instinctive evasions of everything that threatens to interrupt the career of his triumphant jollity and self-complacency. His very size floats him out of all his difficulties in a sea of rich conceits; and he turns round on the pivot of his convenience, with every occasion and at a moment's warning. His natural repugnance to every unpleasant thought or circumstance, of itself makes light of objections, and provokes the most extravagant and licentious answers in his own justification. His indifference to truth puts no check upon his invention, and the more improbable and unexpected his contrivances are, the more happily does he seem to be delivered of them, the anticipation of their effect acting as a stimulus to the gaiety of his fancy. The success of one adventurous sally gives him

spirits to undertake another: he deals always in round numbers, and his exaggerations and excuses are "open, palpable, monstrous as the father that begets them." His dissolute carelessness of what he says discovers itself in the first dialogue with the Prince.

"Falstaff. By the lord, thou say'st true, lad; and is not mine hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?

P. Henry. As the honey of Hible, my old lad of the castle; and is not a buff-jerkin a most sweet robe of durance?

Falstaff. How now, how now, mad wag, what in thy quips and thy quiddities? what a plague have I to do with a buff-jerkin?

P. Henry. Why, what a pox have I to do with mine hostess of the tavern?"

In the same scene he afterwards affects melancholy, from pure satisfaction of heart, and professes reform, because it is the farthest thing in the world from his thoughts. He has no qualms of conscience, and therefore would as soon talk of them as of anything else when the humour takes him.

"Falstaff. But Hal, I pr'ythee trouble me no more with vanity. I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought: an old lord of council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir; but I mark'd him not, and yet he talked very wisely, and in the street too.

P. Henry. Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the street, and no man regards it.

Falstaff. O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm unto me, Hal; God forgive thee for it. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing, and now I am, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over, by the Lord; an I do not, I am a villain. I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom.

P. Henry. Where shall we take a purse to-morrow, Jack?

Falstaff. Where thou wilt, lad, I'll make one; an I do not, call me villain, and baffle me.

P. Henry. I see good amendment of life in thee, from praying to purse-taking.

Falstaff. Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation."

Of the other prominent passages, his account of his pretended resistance to the robbers, "who grew from four men in buckram into eleven" as the imagination of his own valour increased with his relating it, his getting off when the truth is discovered by pretending he knew the Prince, the scene in which in the person of the old king he lectures the prince and gives himself a good character, the soliloquy on honour, and description of his new-raised recruits, his meeting with the chief justice, his abuse of the Prince and Poins, who overhear him, to Doll Tearsheet, his reconciliation with Mrs. Quickly who has arrested him for an old debt, and whom he persuades to pawn her plate to lend him ten pounds more, and the scenes with Shallow and Silence, are all inimitable. Of all of them, the scene in which Falstaff plays the part, first, of the King, and then of Prince Henry, is the one that has been the most often quoted. We must quote it once more in illustration of our remarks.

"*Falstaff.* Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied: for though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears. That thou art my son, I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion; but chiefly, a villainous trick of thine eye, and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip, that doth warrant me. If then thou be son to me, here lies the point;—Why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher, and eat blackberries? A question not to be ask'd. Shall the son of England prove a thief, and take purses? a question to be ask'd. There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch: this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest: for, Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink, but in

tears; not in pleasure, but in passion; not in words only, but in woes also:—and yet there is a virtuous man, whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name.

P. Henry. What manner of man, an it like your majesty?

Falstaff. A goodly portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or, by'r-lady, inclining to threescore; and now I do remember me, his name is Falstaff: if that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me: for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If then the fruit may be known by the tree, as the tree by the fruit, then peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff: him keep with, the rest banish. And tell me now, thou naughty varlet, tell me, where hast thou been this month?

P. Henry. Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play my father.

Falstaff. Depose me? if thou dost it half so gravely, so majestically, both in word and matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker, or a poulterer's hare.

P. Henry. Well, here I am set.

Falstaff. And here I stand:—judge, my masters.

P. Henry. Now, Harry, whence come you?

Falstaff. My noble lord, from Eastcheap.

P. Henry. The complaints I hear of thee are grievous.

Falstaff. Sblood, my lord, they are false:—nay, I'll tickle ye for a young prince, i'faith.

P. Henry. Swearst thou, ungracious boy? henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace: there is a devil haunts thee, in the likeness of a fat old man; a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swoln parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuff cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manning-tree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it? wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein crafty, but in villainy? wherein villainous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing?

Falstaff. I would, your grace would take me with you; whom means your grace?

P. Henry. That villainous, abominable mis-leader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

Falstaff. My lord, the man I know.

P. Henry. I know thou dost.

Falstaff. But to say, I know more harm in him than in myself, were to say more than I know. That he is old (the more the pity)

his white hairs do witness it: but that he is (saving your reverence) a whore-master, that I utterly deny. If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! if to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned: if to be fat be to be hated, then Pharoah's lean kine are to be loved. No, my good lord; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins: but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company; banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.

P. Henry. I do, I will.

[Knocking; and Hostess and Bardolph go out.]

Re-enter BARDOLPH, running.

Bardolph. O, my lord, my lord; the sheriff, with a most monstrous watch, is at the door.

Falstaff. Out, you rogue! play out the play: I have much to say in the behalf of that Falstaff."

One of the most characteristic descriptions of Sir John is that which Mrs. Quickly gives of him when he asks her "What is the gross sum that I owe thee?"

"Hostess. Marry, if thou wert an honest man, thyself, and the money too. Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin-chamber, at the round table, by a sea-coal fire on Wednesday in Whitsun-week, when the Prince broke thy head for likening his father to a singing man of Windsor; thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it? Did not goodwife Keech, the butcher's wife, come in then, and call me gossip Quickly? coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar; telling us, she had a good dish of prawns; whereby thou didst desire to eat some; whereby I told thee they were ill for a green wound? And didst thou not, when she was gone down stairs, desire me to be no more so familiarity with such poor people; saying, that ere long they should call me madam? And didst thou not kiss me, and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings? I put thee now to thy book-oath; deny it, if thou canst."

This scene is to us the most convincing proof of Falstaff's power of gaining over the good will of those he was familiar with, except indeed Bardolph's somewhat pro-

fane exclamation on hearing the account of his death, "Would I were with him, wheresoe'er he is, whether in heaven or hell."

One of the topics of exulting superiority over others most common in Sir John's mouth is his corpulence and the exterior marks of good living which he carries about him, thus "turning his vices into commodity." He accounts for the friendship between the Prince and Poins, from "their legs being both of a bigness;" and compares Justice Shallow to "a man made after supper of a cheese-paring." There cannot be a more striking gradation of character than that between Falstaff and Shallow, and Shallow and Silence. It seems difficult at first to fall lower than the squire; but this fool, great as he is, finds an admirer and humble foil in his cousin Silence. Vain of his acquaintance with Sir John, who makes a butt of him, he exclaims, "Would, cousin Silence, that thou had'st seen that which this knight and I have seen!"—"Aye, Master Shallow, we have heard the chimes at midnight," says Sir John. To Falstaff's observation, "I did not think Master Silence had been a man of this mettle," Silence answers, "Who, I? I have been merry twice and once ere now." What an idea is here conveyed of a prodigality of living? What good husbandry and economical self-denial in his pleasures? What a stock of lively recollections? It is curious that Shakspeare has ridiculed in Justice Shallow, who was "in some authority under the king," that disposition to unmeaning tautology which is the regal infirmity of later times, and which, it may be supposed, he acquired from talking to his cousin Silence, and receiving no answers.

Falstaff. You have here a goodly dwelling, and a rich.

Shallow. Barren, barren, barren; beggars all, beggars all. Sir John: marry, good air. Spread Davy, spread Davy. Well said, Davy.

Falstaff. This Davy serves you for good uses.

Shallow. A good varlet, a good varlet, a very good varlet. By the mass, I have drunk too much sack at supper. A good varlet. Now sit down, now sit down. Come, cousin."

The true spirit of humanity, the thorough knowledge of the stuff we are made of, the practical wisdom with the seeming fooleries in the whole of the garden-scene at Shallow's country-seat, and just before in the exquisite dialogue between him and Silence on the death of old Double, have no parallel anywhere else. In one point of view, they are laughable in the extreme; in another they are equally affecting, if it is affecting to shew *what a little thing is human life*, what a poor forked creature man is!

TWELFTH NIGHT; OR, WHAT YOU WILL

This is justly considered as one of the most delightful of Shakspeare's comedies. It is full of sweetness and pleasantry. It is perhaps too good-natured for comedy. It has little satire, and no spleen. It aims at the ludicrous rather than the ridiculous. It makes us laugh at the follies of mankind, not despise them, and still less bear any ill-will towards them. Shakspeare's comic genius resembles the bee rather in its power of extracting sweets from weeds or poisons, than in leaving a sting behind it. He gives the most amusing exaggeration of the prevailing foibles of his characters, but in a way that they themselves, instead of being offended at, would almost join in to humour; he rather contrives opportunities for them to shew themselves off in the happiest lights, than renders them contemptible in the perverse construction of the wit or malice of others.—There is a certain stage of society in which people become conscious of their peculiarities and absurdities, affect to disguise what they are, and set up pretensions to what they

are not. This gives rise to a corresponding style of comedy, the object of which is to detect the disguises of self-love, and to make reprisals on these preposterous assumptions of vanity, by marking the contrast between the real and the affected character as severely as possible, and denying to those, who would impose on us for what they are not, even the merit which they have. This is the comedy of artificial life, of wit and satire, such as we see it in Congreve, Wycherley, Vanburgh, etc. To this succeeds a state of society from which the same sort of affectation and pretence are banished by a greater knowledge of the world or by their successful exposure on the stage; and which by neutralising the materials of comic character, both natural and artificial, leaves no comedy at all—but *the sentimental*. Such is our modern comedy. There is a period in the progress of manners anterior to both these, in which the foibles and follies of individuals are of nature's planting, not the growth of art or study; in which they are therefore unconscious of them themselves, or care not who knows them, if they can but have their whim out; and in which, as there is no attempt at imposition, the spectators rather receive pleasure from humouring the inclinations of the persons they laugh at, than wish to give them pain by exposing their absurdity. This may be called the comedy of nature, and it is the comedy which we generally find in Shakspeare.—Whether the analysis here given be just or not, the spirit of his comedies is evidently quite distinct from that of the authors above mentioned, as it is in its essence the same with that of Cervantes, and also very frequently of Molière, though he was more systematic in his extravagance than Shakspeare. Shakspeare's comedy is of a pastoral and poetical cast. Folly is indigenous to the soil, and shoots out with native, happy, unchecked luxuriance. Absurdity has every encouragement afforded

it; and nonsense has room to flourish in. Nothing is stunted by the churlish, icy hand of indifference or severity. The poet runs riot in a conceit, and idolises a quibble. His whole object is to turn the meanest or rudest objects to a pleasurable account. The relish which he has of a pun, or of the quaint humour of a low character, does not interfere with the delight with which he describes a beautiful image, or the most refined love. The Clown's forced jests do not spoil the sweetness of the character of Viola; the same house is big enough to hold Malvolio, the Countess, Maria, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew Ague-cheek. For instance, nothing can fall much lower than this last character in intellect or morals: yet how are his weaknesses nursed and dandled by Sir Toby into something "high fantastical," when on Sir Andrew's commendation of himself for dancing and fencing, Sir Toby answers—"Wherefore are these things hid? Wherefore have these gifts a curtain before them? Are they like to take dust like mistress Moll's picture? Why dost thou not go to church in a galliard, and come home in a coranto? My very walk should be a jig! I would not so much as make water but in a cinque-pace. What dost thou mean? Is this a world to hide virtues in? I did think by the excellent constitution of thy leg, it was framed under the star of a galliard!"—How Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and the Clown afterwards *chirp over their cups*, how they "rouse the night-owl in a catch, able to draw three souls out of one weaver!" What can be better than Sir Toby's unanswerable answer to Malvolio, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"—In a word, the best turn is given to everything, instead of the worst. There is a constant infusion of the romantic and enthusiastic, in proportion as the characters are natural and sincere: whereas, in the more artificial style of comedy, every-

thing gives way to ridicule and indifference, there being nothing left but affectation on one side, and incredulity on the other.—Much as we like Shakspeare's comedies, we cannot agree with Dr. Johnson that they are better than his tragedies; nor do we like them half so well. If his inclination to comedy sometimes led him to trifle with the seriousness of tragedy, the poetical and impassioned passages are the best parts of his comedies. The great and secret charm of *TWELFTH NIGHT* is the character of Viola. Much as we like catches and cakes and ale, there is something that we like better. We have a friendship for Sir Toby; we patronise Sir Andrew; we have an understanding with the Clown, a sneaking kindness for Maria and her rogueries; we feel a regard for Malvolio, and sympathise with his gravity, his smiles, his cross garters, his yellow stockings, and imprisonment in the stocks. But there is something that excites in us a stronger feeling than all this—it is Viola's confession of her love.

Duke. What's her history?

Viola. *A hank, my lord, she never told her love;*
She let concealment, like a worm i' th' bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
We men may say more, swear more, but indeed,
Our shews are more than will; for still we prove
Much in our vows, but little in our love.

Duke. But died thy sister of her love, my boy?

Viola. I am all the daughters of my father's house,
 And all the brothers too,—and yet I know not—

Shakspeare alone could describe the effect of his own poetry.

“Oh, it came o'er the ear like the sweet south
 That breathes upon a bank of violets,
 Stealing and giving odour.”

What we so much admire here is not the image of Patience on a monument, which has been generally quoted, but the lines before and after it. "They give a very echo to the seat where love is throned." How long ago it is since we first learnt to repeat them; and still, still they vibrate on the heart, like the sounds which the passing wind draws from the trembling strings of a harp left on some desert shore! There are other passages of not less impassioned sweetness. Such is Olivia's address to Sebastian, whom she supposes to have already deceived her in a promise of marriage.

"Blame not this haste of mine: if you mean well,
Now go with me and with this holy man
Into the chantry by: there before him,
And underneath that consecrated roof,
Plight me the full assurance of your faith,
*That my most jealous and too doubtful soul
May live at peace.*"

V

MILTON

SHAKSPEARE discovers in his writings little religious enthusiasm, and an indifference to personal reputation; he had none of the bigotry of his age, and his political prejudices were not very strong. In these respects, as well as in every other, he formed a direct contrast to Milton. Milton's works are a perpetual invocation to the Muses; a hymn to Fame. He had his thoughts constantly fixed on the contemplation of the Hebrew theocracy, and of a perfect commonwealth; and he seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch of the ark of faith. His religious zeal infused its character into his imagination; so that he devotes himself with the same sense of duty to the cultivation of his genius, as he did to the exercise of virtue, or the good of his country. The spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet, vied with each other in his breast. His mind appears to have held equal communion with the inspired writers, and with the bards and sages of ancient Greece and Rome;—

“Blind Thamyris, and blind Mæonides,
And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old.”

He had a high standard, with which he was always comparing himself, nothing short of which could satisfy his jealous ambition. He thought of nobler forms and nobler things than those he found about him. He lived apart, in the solitude of his own thoughts, carefully excluding from

his mind whatever might distract its purposes, or alloy its purity, or damp its zeal. "With darkness and with dangers compassed round," he had the mighty models of antiquity always present to his thoughts, and determined to raise a monument of equal height and glory, "piling up every stone of lustre from the brook," for the delight and wonder of posterity. He had girded himself up, and as it were, sanctified his genius to this service from his youth. "For after," he says, "I had from my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences as my age could suffer, by sundry masters and teachers, it was found that whether aught was imposed upon me by them, or betaken to of my own choice, the style by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live; but much latelier, in the private academies of Italy, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout, met with acceptance above what was looked for; I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times as they should not willingly let it die. The accomplishment of these intentions which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself anything worth to my country, lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet, I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat

of youth or the vapours of wine; like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs. Although it nothing content me to have disclosed thus much beforehand; but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies."

So that of Spenser:

"The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought,
And is with child of glorious great intent,
Can never rest until it forth hath brought
The eternal brood of glory excellent."

Milton, therefore, did not write from casual impulse, but after a severe examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to leave nothing undone which it was in his power to do. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost: he surrounds it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. He refines on his descriptions of beauty; loading sweets on sweets, till the sense aches at

them; and raises his images of terror to a gigantic elevation, that "makes Ossa like a wart." In Milton there is always an appearance of effort: in Shakspeare, scarcely any.

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or profane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer. He is a writer of centos, and yet in originality scarcely inferior to Homer. The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials. In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty intellect, that the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them. The quantity of art in him shews the strength of his genius: the weight of his intellectual obligations would have oppressed any other writer. Milton's learning has all the effect of intuition. He describes objects, of which he could only have read in books, with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature. He makes words tell as pictures.

"Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams."

The word *lucid* here gives to the idea all the sparkling effect of the most perfect landscape.

And again:

"As when a vulture on Imaus bred,
Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,
Dislodging from a region scarce of prey,
To gorge the flesh of lambs and yeanning kids
On hills where flocks are fed, flies towards the springs
Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams;
But in his way lights on the barren plains
Of Sericana, where Chineses drive
With sails and wind their cany waggons light."

If Milton had taken a journey for the express purpose, he could not have described this scenery and mode of life better. Such passages are like demonstrations of natural history. Instances might be multiplied without end.

We might be tempted to suppose that the vividness with which he describes visible objects, was owing to their having acquired an unusual degree of strength in his mind, after the privation of his sight; but we find the same palpableness and truth in the descriptions which occur in his early poems. In *Lycidas*, he speaks of "the great vision of the guarded mount," with that preternatural weight of impression with which it would present itself suddenly to "the pilot of some small night-foundered skiff;" and the lines in the *Penseroso*, describing "the wandering moon,

"Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,"

are as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her. There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different senses, whether colours, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged his attention at the time. It has been indeed objected to Milton, by a common perversity of criticism, that his ideas were musical rather than picturesque, as if because they were in the highest degree musical, they must be (to keep the sage critical balance even, and to allow no one man to possess two qualities at the same time) proportionably deficient in other respects. But Milton's poetry is not cast in any such narrow, common-place mould; it is not so barren of resources. His worship of the Muse was not so simple or confined. A sound arises "like a steam of rich distilled perfumes;" we hear the pealing organ, but the incense on the altars is also there, and the statues of the gods are ranged

around! The ear indeed predominates over the eye, because it is more immediately affected, and because the language of music blends more immediately with, and forms a more natural accompaniment to, the variable and indefinite associations of ideas conveyed by words. But where the associations of the imagination are not the principal thing, the individual object is given by Milton with equal force and beauty. The strongest and best proof of this, as a characteristic power of his mind, is, that the persons of Adam and Eve, of Satan, etc. are always accompanied, in our imagination, with the grandeur of the naked figure; they convey to us the ideas of sculpture. As an instance, take the following:

"He soon
Saw within ken a glorious Angel stand,
The same whom John saw also in the sun:
His back was turned, but not his brightness hid;
Of beaming sunny rays a golden tiar
Circled his head, nor less his locks behind
Illustrious on his shoulders fledge with wings
Lay waving round; on some great charge employ'd
He seem'd, or fix'd in cogitation deep.
Glad was the spirit impure, as now in hope
To find who might direct his wand'ring flight
To Paradise, the happy seat of man,
His journey's end, and our beginning woe.
But first he casts to change his proper shape,
Which else might work him danger or delay:
And now a stripling cherub he appears,
Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb
Suitable grace diffus'd, so well he feign'd:
Under a coronet his flowing hair
In curls on either cheek play'd; wings he wore
Of many a colour'd plume sprinkled with gold,
His habit fit for speed succinct, and held
Before his decent steps a silver wand."

The figures introduced here have all the elegance and precision of a Greek statue; glossy and impurpled, tinged

with golden light, and musical as the strings of Memnon's harp!

Again, nothing can be more magnificent than the portrait of Beelzebub:

"With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
The weight of mightiest monarchies:"

Or the comparison of Satan, as he "lay floating many a rood," to "that sea beast,"

"Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream!"

What a force of imagination is there in this last expression! What an idea it conveys of the size of that hugest of created beings, as if it shrunk up the ocean to a stream, and took up the sea in its nostrils as a very little thing! Force of style is one of Milton's greatest excellences. Hence, perhaps, he stimulates us more in the reading, and less afterwards. The way to defend Milton against all impugnors, is to take down the book and read it.

Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakspeare's) that deserves the name of verse. Dr. Johnson, who had modelled his ideas of versification on the regular sing-song of Pope, condemns the *Paradise Lost* as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together, (with the exception already mentioned). Spenser is the most harmonious of our stanza writers, as Dryden

is the most sounding and varied of our rhymists. But in neither is there anything like the same ear for music, the same power of approximating the varieties of poetical to those of musical rhythm, as there is in our great epic poet. The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image. They rise or fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick or affectation, as the occasion seems to require.

The following are some of the finest instances :

“ His hand was known
In Heaven by many a tower'd structure high;—
Nor was his name unheard or unador'd
In ancient Greece; and in the Ausonian land
Men called him Mulciber; and how he fell
From Heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
Sheer o'er the crystal battlements; from morn
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
A summer's day; and with the setting sun
Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
On Lemnos, the Ægean isle: thus they relate,
Erring.”—

“ But chief the spacious hall
Thick swarm'd, both on the ground and in the air,
Brush'd with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides,
Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
In clusters; they among fresh dews and flow'rs
Fly to and fro; or on the smoothed plank,
The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
New rubb'd with balm, expatiate, and confer
Their state affairs. So thick the airy crowd
Swarm'd and were straiten'd; till the signal giv'n,
Behold a wonder! They but now who seem'd
In bigness to surpass earth's giant sons,
Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
Throng numberless, like that Pygmean race
Beyond the Indian mount, or fairy elves,
Whose midnight revels by a forest side
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,

Or dreams he sees, while over-head the moon
 Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
 Wheels her pale course: they on their mirth and dance
 Intent, with jocund music charm his ear;
 At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds."

I can give only another instance, though I have some difficulty in leaving off.

"Round he surveys (and well might, where he stood
 So high above the circling canopy
 Of night's extended shade) from th' eastern point
 Of Libra to the fleecy star that bears
 Andromeda far off Atlantic seas
 Beyond the horizon: then from pole to pole
 He views in breadth, and without longer pause
 Down right into the world's first region throws
 His flight precipitant, and winds with ease
 Through the pure marble air his oblique way
 Amongst innumerable stars that shone
 Stars distant, but nigh hand seem'd other worlds;
 Or other worlds they seem'd or happy isles," etc.

The verse, in this exquisitely modulated passage, floats up and down as if it had itself wings. Milton has himself given us the theory of his versification—

"Such as the meeting soul may pierce
 In notes with many a winding bout
 Of linked sweetness long drawn out."

Dr. Johnson and Pope would have converted his vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse. Read any other blank verse but Milton's,—Thomson's, Young's, Cowper's, Wordsworth's,—and it will be found, from the want of the same insight into "the hidden soul of harmony," to be mere lumbering prose.

To proceed to a consideration of the merits of *Paradise Lost*, in the most essential point of view, I mean as to the

poetry of character and passion. I shall say nothing of the fable, or of other technical objections or excellences; but I shall try to explain at once the foundation of the interest belonging to the poem. I am ready to give up the dialogues in Heaven, where, as Pope justly observes, "God the Father turns a school-divine;" nor do I consider the battle of the angels as the climax of sublimity, or the most successful effort of Milton's pen. In a word, the interest of the poem arises from the daring ambition and fierce passions of Satan, and from the account of the paradisaical happiness, and the loss of it by our first parents. Three-fourths of the work are taken up with these characters, and nearly all that relates to them is unmingled sublimity and beauty. The two first books alone are like too massy pillars of solid gold.

Satan is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created beings, who, for endeavouring to be equal with the highest, and to divide the empire of heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to hell. His aim was no less than the throne of the universe; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright, the third part of the heavens, whom he lured after him with his countenance, and who durst defy the Omnipotent in arms. His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom, and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He stood like a tower; or

"As when Heaven's fire
Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines!"

He is still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own him as their sovereign leader, and with whose fate he sympathises as he views them round, far as the eye can reach; though he keeps aloof from them in his own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast. An outcast from Heaven, Hell trembles beneath his feet, Sin and Death are at his heels, and mankind are his easy prey.

"All is not lost; th' unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield,
And what else is not to be overcome,"

are still his. The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it; the fierceness of tormenting flames, is qualified and made innoxious by the greater fierceness of his pride; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought, by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil—but of the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never once flinches. His love of power and contempt for suffering are never once relaxed from the highest pitch of intensity. His thoughts burn like a hell within him; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other consideration. The consciousness of a determined purpose, of "that intellectual being, those thoughts that wander through eternity," though accompanied with endless pain, he prefers to nonentity, to "being swallowed up and lost in the wide womb of uncreated night." He expresses the

sum and substance of all ambition in one line: "Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable, doing or suffering!" After such a conflict as his, and such a defeat, to retreat in order, to rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something; but he does more than this—he founds a new empire in hell, and from it conquers this new world, whither he bends his undaunted flight, forcing his way through nether and surrounding fires. The poet has not in all this given us a mere shadowy outline; the strength is equal to the magnitude of the conception. The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast; Prometheus chained to his rock was not a more terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, "rising aloft incumbent on the dusky air," it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate images: so that we see it always before us, gigantic, irregular, portentous, uneasy, and disturbed—but dazzling in its faded splendour, the clouded ruins of a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will; he has no bodily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. The horns and tail are not there, poor emblems of the unbending, unconquered spirit, of the writhing agonies within. Milton was too magnanimous and open an antagonist to support his argument by the bye-tricks of a hump and cloven foot; to bring into the fair field of controversy the good old catholic prejudices of which Tasso and Dante have availed themselves, and which the mystic German critics would restore. He relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple to give the devil his due. Some persons may think that he has carried his liberality too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Considering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault, from his faith in

religion, and his love of rebellion; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.

Not only the figure of Satan, but his speeches in council, his soliloquies, his address to Eve, his share in the war in heaven, or in the fall of man, show the same decided superiority of character. To give only one instance, almost the first speech he makes:

“Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
That we must change for Heaven: this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is sov’rain can dispose and bid
What shall be right: farthest from him is best,
Whom reason hath equal’d, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewell happy fields,
Where joy for ever dwells: Hail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
A mind not to be chang’d by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free: th’ Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice,
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.”

The whole of the speeches and debates in Pandemonium are well worthy of the place and the occasion—with Gods for speakers, and angels and archangels for hearers. There is a decided manly tone in the arguments and sentiments, an eloquent dogmatism, as if each person spoke from thorough conviction; an excellence which Milton probably borrowed from his spirit of partisanship, or else his spirit of partisanship from the natural firmness and vigour of his

mind. In this respect Milton resembles Dante, (the only modern writer with whom he has any thing in common) and it is remarkable that Dante, as well as Milton, was a political partisan. That approximation to the severity of impassioned prose which has been made an objection to Milton's poetry, and which is chiefly to be met with in these bitter invectives, is one of its great excellences. The author might here turn his philippics against Salmasius to good account. The rout in Heaven is like the fall of some mighty structure, nodding to its base, "with hideous ruin and combustion down." But, perhaps, of all the passages in *Paradise Lost*, the description of the employments of the angels during the absence of Satan, some of whom "retreated in a silent valley, sing with notes angelical to many a harp their own heroic deeds and hapless fall by doom of battle" is the most perfect example of mingled pathos and sublimity.—What proves the truth of this noble picture in every part, and that the frequent complaint of want of interest in it is the fault of the reader, not of the poet, is that when any interest of a practical kind takes a shape that can be at all turned into this, (and there is little doubt that Milton had some such in his eye in writing it,) each party converts it to its own purposes, feels the absolute identity of these abstracted and high speculations; and that, in fact, a noted political writer of the present day has exhausted nearly the whole account of Satan in the *Paradise Lost*, by applying it to a character whom he considered as after the devil, (though I do not know whether he would make even that exception) the greatest enemy of the human race. This may serve to show that Milton's Satan is not a very insipid personage.

Of Adam and Eve it has been said, that the ordinary reader can feel little interest in them, because they have none of the passions, pursuits, or even relations of human

life, except that of man and wife, the least interesting of all others, if not to the parties concerned, at least to the by-standers. The preference has on this account been given to Homer, who, it is said, has left very vivid and infinitely diversified pictures of all the passions and affections, public and private, incident to human nature,—the relations of son, of brother, parent, friend, citizen, and many others. Longinus preferred the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*, on account of the greater number of battles it contains; but I can neither agree to his criticism, nor assent to the present objection. It is true, there is little action in this part of Milton's poem; but there is much repose, and more enjoyment. There are none of the every-day occurrences, contentions, disputes, wars, fightings, feuds, jealousies, trades, professions, liveries, and common handicrafts of life; "no kind of traffic; letters are not known; no use of service, of riches, poverty, contract, succession, bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard none; no occupation, no treason, felony, sword, pike, knife, gun, nor need of any engine." So much the better; thank Heaven, all these were yet to come. But still the die was cast, and in them our doom was sealed. In them

"The generations were prepared; the pangs,
The internal pangs, were ready, the dread strife
Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny."

In their first false step we trace all our future woe, with loss of Eden. But there was a short and precious interval between, like the first blush of morning before the day is overcast with tempest, the dawn of the world, the birth of nature from "the unapparent deep," with its first dews and freshness on its cheek, breathing odours. Theirs was the first delicious taste of life, and on them depended all that was to come of it. In them hung trembling all our

hopes and fears. They were as yet alone in the world, in the eye of nature, wondering at their new being, full of enjoyment and enraptured with one another, with the voice of their Maker walking in the garden, and ministering angels attendant on their steps, winged messengers from heaven like rosy clouds descending in their sight. Nature played around them her virgin fancies wild; and spread for them a repast where no crude surfeit reigned. Was there nothing in this scene, which God and nature alone witnessed, to interest a modern critic? What need was there of action, where the heart was full of bliss and innocence without it! They had nothing to do but feel their own happiness, and "know to know no more." "They toiled not, neither did they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." All things seem to acquire fresh sweetness, and to be clothed with fresh beauty in their sight. They tasted as it were for themselves and us, of all that there ever was pure in human bliss. "In them the burthen of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world, is lightened." They stood awhile perfect, but they afterwards fell, and were driven out of Paradise, tasting the first fruits of bitterness as they had done of bliss. But their pangs were such as a pure spirit might feel at the sight—their tears "such as angels weep." The pathos is of that mild contemplative kind which arises from regret for the loss of unspeakable happiness, and resignation to inevitable fate. There is none of the fierceness of intemperate passion, none of the agony of mind and turbulence of action, which is the result of the habitual struggles of the will with circumstances, irritated by repeated disappointment, and constantly setting its desires most eagerly on that which there is an impossibility of attaining. This would have destroyed the beauty of the whole picture. They had received their unlooked-for hap-

piness as a free gift from their Creator's hands, and they submitted to its loss, not without sorrow, but without impious and stubborn repining.

"In either hand the hast'ning angel caught
Our ling'ring parents, and to th' eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain; then disappear'd.
They looking back, all th' eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Wav'd over by that flaming brand, the gate
With dreadful faces throng'd, and fiery arms:
Some natural tears they dropt, but wip'd them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide."

VI

POPE

THE question, whether Pope was a poet, has hardly yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling; for if he was not a great poet, he must have been a great prose-writer, that is, he was a great writer of some sort. He was a man of exquisite faculties, and of the most refined taste; and as he chose verse (the most obvious distinction of poetry) as the vehicle to express his ideas, he has generally passed for a poet, and a good one. If, indeed, by a great poet, we mean one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart, Pope was not in this sense a great poet; for the bent, the characteristic power of his mind, lay the clean contrary way; namely, in representing things as they appear to the indifferent observer, stripped of prejudice and passion, as in his *Critical Essays*; or in representing them in the most contemptible and insignificant point of view, as in his *Satires*; or in clothing the little with mock-dignity, as in his poems of *Fancy*; or in adorning the trivial incidents and familiar relations of life with the utmost elegance of expression, and all the flattering illusions of friendship or self-love, as in his *Epistles*. He was not then distinguished as a poet of lofty enthusiasm, of strong imagination, with a passionate sense of the beauties of nature, or a deep insight into the workings of the heart; but he was a wit, and a critic, a man of sense, of observation, and the world, with a keen relish for the elegances of art, or of nature when embellished by art, a quick tact for propriety of

thought and manners as established by the forms and customs of society, a refined sympathy with the sentiments and habitudes of human life, as he felt them within the little circle of his family and friends. He was, in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art; and the distinction between the two, as well as I can make it out, is this—The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature; to be identified with and to foreknow and to record the feelings of all men at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions; and to exert the same power over the minds of his readers, that nature does. He sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they are; he feels them in their universal interest, for he feels them as they affect the first principles of his and our common nature. Such was Homer, such was Shakspeare, whose works will last as long as nature, because they are a copy of the indestructible forms and everlasting impulses of nature, welling out from the bosom as from a perennial spring, or stamped upon the senses by the hand of their maker. The power of the imagination in them, is the representative power of all nature. It has its centre in the human soul, and makes the circuit of the universe.

Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class, or in the first rank of it. He saw nature only dressed by art; he judged of beauty by fashion; he sought for truth in the opinions of the world; he judged of the feelings of others by his own. The capacious soul of Shakspeare had an intuitive and mighty sympathy with whatever could enter

into the heart of man in all possible circumstances: Pope had an exact knowledge of all that he himself loved or hated, wished or wanted. Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth, through Chaos and old Night. Pope's Muse never wandered with safety, but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto into his library back again. His mind dwelt with greater pleasure on his own garden, than on the garden of Eden; he could describe the faultless whole-length mirror that reflected his own person, better than the smooth surface of the lake that reflects the face of heaven—a piece of cut-glass or a pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect, than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun. He would be more delighted with a patent lamp, than with “the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow,” that fills the skies with its soft silent lustre, that trembles through the cottage window, and cheers the watchful mariner on the lonely wave. In short, he was the poet of personality and of polished life. That which was nearest to him, was the greatest; the fashion of the day bore sway in his mind over the immutable laws of nature. He preferred the artificial to the natural in external objects, because he had a stronger fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or proprietor of a gewgaw, than admiration of that which was interesting to all mankind. He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he could not grapple; while he could trifle with the conventional and superficial modifications of mere sentiment at will, laugh at or admire, put them on or off like a masquerade dress, make much or little of them, indulge them for a longer or a shorter time, as he pleased; and because while they amused his fancy and exercised his ingenuity, they never once disturbed his vanity, his levity, or indifference. His mind

was the antithesis of strength and grandeur; its power was the power of indifference. He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry: he was in poetry what the sceptic is in religion.

It cannot be denied, that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing, than in aggrandizing objects; in checking, not in encouraging our enthusiasm; in sneering at the extravagances of fancy or passion, instead of giving a loose to them; in describing a row of pins and needles, rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans; in penning a lampoon or a compliment, and in praising Martha Blount.

Shakspeare says,

"In Fortune's ray and brightness
The herd hath more annoyance by the brize
Than by the tyger: but when the splitting wind
Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks,
And flies fled under shade, why then
The thing of courage,
As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise;
And with an accent tuned in the self-same key,
Replies to chiding Fortune."

There is none of this rough work in Pope. His Muse was on a peace-establishment, and grew somewhat effeminate by long ease and indulgence. He lived in the smiles of fortune, and basked in the favour of the great. In his smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries; its forked lightnings pointed sarcasms; for "the gnarled oak," he gives us "the soft myrtle:" for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plats, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills; for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower-pot, or the fall of a china jar; for the tug and war of the elements, or the deadly strife of the passions, we have

"Calm contemplation and poetic ease."

Yet within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how exquisite, was contained! What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiment! It is like looking at the world through a microscope, where everything assumes a new character and a new consequence, where things are seen in their minutest circumstances and slightest shades of difference; where the little becomes gigantic, the deformed beautiful, and the beautiful deformed. The wrong end of the magnifier is, to be sure, held to every thing, but still the exhibition is highly curious, and we know not whether to be most pleased or surprised. Such, at least, is the best account I am able to give of this extraordinary man, without doing injustice to him or others. It is time to refer to particular instances in his works.—The Rape of the Lock is the best or most ingenious of these. It is the most exquisite specimen of *fillagree* work ever invented. It is admirable in proportion as it is made of nothing.

“ More subtle web Arachne cannot spin,
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched dew, do not in th' air more lightly flee.”

It is made of gauze and silver spangles. The most glittering appearance is given to every thing, to paste, pomatum, billet-doux, and patches. Airs, languid airs, breathe around;—the atmosphere is perfumed with affectation. A toilette is described with the solemnity of an altar raised to the goddess of vanity, and the history of a silver bodkin is given with all the pomp of heraldry. No pains are spared, no profusion of ornament, no splendour of poetic diction, to set off the meanest things. The balance between the concealed irony and the assumed gravity, is as nicely trimmed as the balance of power in Europe. The little

is made great, and the great little. You hardly know whether to laugh or weep. It is the triumph of insignificance, the apotheosis of foppery and folly. It is the perfection of the mock-heroic! I will give only the two following passages in illustration of these remarks. Can anything be more elegant and graceful than the description of Belinda, in the beginning of the second canto?

“Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,
 The sun first rises o’er the purpled main,
 Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
 Launch’d on the bosom of the silver Thames.
 Fair nymphs, and well-drest youths around her shone,
 But ev’ry eye was fix’d on her alone.
 On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
 Which Jews might kiss, and infidels adore.
 Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
 Quick as her eyes, and as unfix’d as those;
 Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
 Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
 Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike;
 And like the sun, they shine on all alike.
 Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
 Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide;
 If to her share some female errors fall,
 Look on her face, and you’ll forget ’em all.
 This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
 Nourish’d two locks, which graceful hung behind
 In equal curls, and well conspir’d to deck
 With shining ringlets the smooth iv’ry neck.”

The following is the introduction to the account of Belinda’s assault upon the baron bold, who had dissevered one of these locks “from her fair head for ever and for ever.”

“Now meet thy fate, incens’d Belinda cry’d,
 And drew a deadly bodkin from her side.
 (The same his ancient personage to deck,
 Her great, great grandsire wore about his neck,
 In three seal-rings; which after, melted down,
 Form’d a vast buckle for his widow’s gown:

Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,
The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew:
Then in a bodkin grac'd her mother's hairs,
Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)"

I do not know how far Pope was indebted for the original idea, or the delightful execution of this poem, to the *Lutrin* of Boileau.

The *Rape of the Lock* is a double-refined essence of wit and fancy, as the *Essay on Criticism* is of wit and sense. The quantity of thought and observation in this work, for so young a man as Pope was when he wrote it, is wonderful: unless we adopt the supposition, that most men of genius spend the rest of their lives in teaching others what they themselves have learned under twenty. The conciseness and felicity of the expression is equally remarkable. Thus in reasoning on the variety of men's opinions, he says—

"'Tis with our judgments, as our watches; none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own."

Nothing can be more original and happy than the general remarks and illustrations in the *Essay*: the critical rules laid down are too much those of a school, and of a confined one. There is one passage in the *Essay on Criticism* in which the author speaks with that eloquent enthusiasm of the fame of ancient writers, which those will always feel who have themselves any hope or chance of immortality. I have quoted the passage elsewhere, but I will repeat it here.

"Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands;
Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,
Destructive war, and all-involving age.
Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days,
Immortal heirs of universal praise!"

Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow."

These lines come with double force and beauty on the reader as they were dictated by the writer's despair of ever attaining that lasting glory which he celebrates with such disinterested enthusiasm in others, from the lateness of the age in which he lived, and from his writing in a tongue, not understood by other nations, and that grows obsolete and unintelligible to ourselves at the end of every second century. But he needed not have thus antedated his own poetical doom—the loss and entire oblivion of that which can never die. If he had known, he might have boasted that his "little bark" wafted down the stream of time,

"With *theirs* should sail,
Pursue the triumph and partake the gale"—

if those who know how to set a due value on the blessing, were not the last to decide confidently on their own pretensions to it.

There is a cant in the present day about genius, as every thing in poetry: there was a cant in the time of Pope about sense, as performing all sorts of wonders. It was a kind of watchword, the shibboleth of a critical party of the day. As a proof of the exclusive attention which it occupied in their minds, it is remarkable that in the Essay on Criticism (not a very long poem) there are no less than half a score successive couplets rhyming to the word *sense*. This appears almost incredible without giving the instances, and no less so when they are given.

"But of the two, less dangerous is the offence,
To tire our patience than mislead our sense" : *l.* 253, 4.

"In search of wit these lose their common sense,
And then turn critics in their own defence." *l.* 26, 29.

"Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense." *l.* 209, 10.

"Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense." *l.* 324, 5.

"'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;
The sound must seem an echo to the sense." *l.* 364, 5.

"At every trifle scorn to take offence;
That always shews great pride, or little sense." *l.* 386, 7.

"Be silent always, when you doubt your sense,
And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence." *l.* 366, 7.

"Be niggards of advice on no pretence,
For the worst avarice is that of sense." *l.* 578, 9.

"Strain out the last dull dropping of their sense,
And rhyme with all the rage of impotence." *l.* 608, 9.

"Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into sense." *l.* 653, 4.

I have mentioned this the more for the sake of those critics who are bigotted idolisers of our author, chiefly on the score of his correctness. These persons seem to be of opinion that "there is but one perfect writer, even Pope." This is, however, a mistake: his excellence is by no means faultlessness. If he had no great faults, he is full of little errors. His grammatical construction is often lame and imperfect. In the Abélard and Eloise, he says—

"There died the best of passions, Love and Fame."

This is not a legitimate ellipsis. Fame is not a passion, though love is: but his ear was evidently confused by the meeting of the sounds "love and fame," as if they of themselves immediately implied "love, and love of fame." Pope's rhymes are constantly defective, being rhymes to the eye instead of the ear; and this to a greater degree,

not only than in later, but than in preceding writers. The praise of his versification must be confined to its uniform smoothness and harmony. In the translation of the *Iliad*, which has been considered as his masterpiece in style and execution, he continually changes the tenses in the same sentence for the purpose of the rhyme, which shews either a want of technical resources, or great inattention to punctilious exactness. But to have done with this.

The Epistle of Eloise to Abelard is the only exception I can think of, to the general spirit of the foregoing remarks; and I should be disingenuous not to acknowledge that it is an exception. The foundation is in the letters themselves of Abelard and Eloise, which are quite as impressive, but still in a different way. It is fine as a poem; it is finer as a piece of high-wrought eloquence. No woman could be supposed to write a finer love-letter in verse. Besides the richness of the historical materials, the high *gusto* of the original sentiments which Pope had to work upon, there were perhaps circumstances in his own situation which made him enter into the subject with even more than a poet's feeling. The tears shed are drops gushing from the heart; the words are burning sighs breathed from the soul of love. Perhaps the poem to which it bears the greatest similarity in our language, is Dryden's *Tancred and Sigismunda*, taken from Boccaccio. Pope's Eloise will bear this comparison; and after such a test, with Boccaccio for the original author, and Dryden for the translator, it need shrink from no other. There is something exceedingly tender and beautiful in the sound of the concluding lines:

"If ever chance two wandering lovers brings
To Paraclete's white walls and silver springs," etc.

The Essay on Man is not Pope's best work. It is a theory which Bolingbroke is supposed to have given him,

and which he expanded into verse. But "he spins the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument." All that he says, "the very words, and to the self-same tune," would prove just as well that whatever is, is *wrong*, as that whatever is, is *right*. The Dunciad has splendid passages, but in general it is dull, heavy, and mechanical. The sarcasm already quoted on Settle, the Lord Mayor's poet, (for at that time there was a city as well as a court poet)

"Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
But lives in Settle's numbers one day more"—

is the finest inversion of immortality conceivable. It is even better than his serious apostrophe to the great heirs of glory, the triumphant bards of antiquity!

The finest burst of severe moral invective in all Pope, is the prophetic conclusion of the epilogue to the Satires:

"Virtue may chuse the high or low degree,
'Tis just alike to virtue, and to me;
Dwell in a monk, or light upon a king,
She's still the same belov'd, contented thing.
Vice is undone if she forgets her birth,
And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth.
But 'tis the Fall degrades her to a whore:
Let Greatness own her, and she's mean no more.
Her birth, her beauty, crowds and courts confess,
Chaste matrons praise her, and grave bishops bless;
In golden chains the willing world she draws,
And hers the gospel is, and hers the laws;
Mounts the tribunal, lifts her scarlet head,
And sees pale Virtue carted in her stead.
Lo! at the wheels of her triumphal car,
Old England's Genius, rough with many a scar,
Dragged in the dust! his arms hang idly round,
His flag inverted trails along the ground!
Our youth, all livery'd o'er with foreign gold,
Before her dance; behind her, crawl the old!
See thronging millions to the Pagod run,
And offer country, parent, wife, or son!

Hear her black trumpet through the land proclaim,
 That *not to be corrupted is the shame*.
 In soldier, churchman, patriot, man in pow'r,
 'Tis av'rice all, ambition is no more!
 See all our nobles begging to be slaves!
 See all our fools aspiring to be knaves!
 The wit of cheats, the courage of a whore,
 Are what ten thousand envy and adore:
 All, all look up with reverential awe,
 At crimes that 'scape or triumph o'er the law;
 While truth, worth, wisdom, daily they decry:
 Nothing is sacred now but villainy.
 Yet may this verse (if such a verse remain)
 Show there was one who held it in disdain."

His Satires are not in general so good as his Epistles. His enmity is effeminate and petulant from a sense of weakness, as his friendship was tender from a sense of gratitude. I do not like, for instance, his character of Chartres, or his characters of women. His delicacy often borders upon sickliness; his fastidiousness makes others fastidious. But his compliments are divine; they are equal in value to a house or an estate. Take the following. In addressing Lord Mansfield, he speaks of the grave as a scene,

"Where Murray, long enough his country's pride,
 Shall be no more than Tully, or than Hyde."

To Bolingbroke he says—

"Why rail they then if but one wreath of mine,
 Oh all-accomplished St. John, deck thy shrine?"

Again, he has bequeathed this praise to Lord Cornbury—

"Despise low thoughts, low gains:
 Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains;
 Be virtuous and be happy for your pains."

One would think (though there is no knowing) that a descendant of this nobleman, if there be such a person living, could hardly be guilty of a mean or paltry action.

The finest piece of personal satire in Pope (perhaps in the world) is his character of Addison; and this, it may be observed, is of a mixed kind, made up of his respect for the man, and a cutting sense of his failings. The other finest one is that of Buckingham, and the best part of that is the pleasurable

“Alas! how changed from him,
That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim:
Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,
The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love!”

Among his happiest and most inimitable effusions are the Epistles to Arbuthnot, and to Jervas the painter; amiable patterns of the delightful unconcerned life, blending ease with dignity, which poets and painters then led. Thus he says to Arbuthnot—

“Why did I write? What sin to me unknown
Dipp'd me in ink, my parents' or my own?
As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.
I left no calling for this idle trade,
No duty broke, no father disobey'd:
The Muse but served to ease some friend, not wife;
To help me through this long disease, my life;
To second, Arbuthnot! thy art and care,
And teach the being you preserv'd to bear.
But why then publish? Granville the polite,
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;
Well-natur'd Garth, inflam'd with early praise,
And Congreve lov'd, and Swift endur'd my lays;
The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read;
E'en mitred Rochester would nod the head;
And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
With open arms receiv'd one poet more.

Happy my studies, when by these approv'd!
 Happier their author, when by these belov'd!
 From these the world will judge of men and books,
 Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks."

I cannot help giving also the conclusion of the Epistle to Jervas.

"Oh, lasting as those colours may they shine,
 Free as thy stroke, yet faultless as thy line;
 New graces yearly like thy works display,
 Soft without weakness, without glaring gay;
 Led by some rule, that guides, but not constrains;
 And finish'd more through happiness than pains.
 The kindred arts shall in their praise conspire,
 One dip the pencil, and one string the lyre.
 Yet should the Graces all thy figures place,
 And breathe an air divine on ev'ry face;
 Yet should the Muses bid my numbers roll
 Strong as their charms, and gentle as their soul;
 With Zeuxis' Helen thy Bridgewater vie,
 And these be sung till Granville's Myra die:
 Alas! how little from the grave we claim!
 Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name."

And shall we cut ourselves off from beauties like these with a theory? Shall we shut up our books, and seal up our senses, to please the dull spite and inordinate vanity of those "who have eyes, but they see not—ears, but they hear not—and understandings, but they understand not,"—and go about asking our blind guides, whether Pope was a poet or not? It will never do. Such persons, when you point out to them a fine passage in Pope, turn it off to something of the same sort in some other writer. Thus they say that the line, "I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came," is pretty, but taken from that of Ovid—*Et quum concubæ scribere, verum erat*. They are safe in this mode of criticism: there is no danger of any one's tracing their writings to the classics.

Pope's letters and prose writings neither take away from, nor add to his poetical reputation. There is, occasionally, a littleness of manner, and an unnecessary degree of caution. He appears anxious to say a good thing in every word, as well as every sentence. They, however, give a very favourable idea of his moral character in all respects; and his letters to Atterbury, in his disgrace and exile, do equal honour to both. If I had to choose, there are one or two persons, and but one or two, that I should like to have been better than Pope!

VII

ON THE PERIODICAL ESSAYISTS

"The proper study of mankind is man."

I now come to speak of that sort of writing which has been so successfully cultivated in this country by our periodical Essayists, and which consists in applying the talents and resources of the mind to all that mixed mass of human affairs, which, though not included under the head of any regular art, science, or profession, falls under the cognisance of the writer, and "comes home to the business and bosoms of men." *Quicquid agunt homines nostri farrago libelli*, is the general motto of this department of literature. It does not treat of minerals or fossils, of the virtues of plants, or the influence of planets; it does not meddle with forms of belief or systems of philosophy, nor launch into the world of spiritual existences; but it makes familiar with the world of men and women, records their actions, assigns their motives, exhibits their whims, characterises their pursuits in all their singular and endless variety, ridicules their absurdities, exposes their inconsistencies, "holds the mirror up to nature, and shews the very age and body of the time its form and pressure;" takes minutes of our dress, air, looks, words, thoughts, and actions; shews us what we are, and what we are not; plays the whole game of human life over before us, and by making us enlightened spectators of its many-coloured scenes, enables us (if possible) to become tolerably reasonable agents in the one in which we have to perform a part. "The act

and practicable part of life is thus made the mistress of our theorique." It is the best and most natural course of study. It is in morals and manners what the experimental is in natural philosophy, as opposed to the dogmatical method. It does not deal in sweeping clauses of proscription and anathema, but in nice distinction and liberal constructions. It makes up its general accounts from details, its few theories from many facts. It does not try to prove all black or all white as it wishes, but lays on the intermediate colours, (and most of them not unpleasing ones,) as it finds them blended with "the web of our life, which is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together." It inquires what human life is and has been, to shew what it ought to be. It follows it into courts and camps, into town and country, into rustic sports or learned disputations, into the various shades of prejudice or ignorance, of refinement or barbarism, into its private haunts or public pageants, into its weaknesses and littlenesses, its professions and its practices—before it pretends to distinguish right from wrong, or one thing from another. How, indeed, should it do so otherwise?

*"Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,
Plenius et melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit."*

The writers I speak of are, if not moral philosophers, moral historians, and that's better: or if they are both, they found the one character upon the other; their premises precede their conclusions; and we put faith in their testimony, for we know that it is true.

Montaigne was the first person who in his *Essays* led the way to this kind of writing among the moderns. The great merit of Montaigne then was, that he may be said to have been the first who had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man. And as courage is generally

the effect of conscious strength, he was probably led to do so by the richness, truth, and force of his own observations on books and men. He was, in the truest sense, a man of original mind, that is, he had the power of looking at things for himself, or as they really were, instead of blindly trusting to, and fondly repeating what others told him that they were. He got rid of the go-cart of prejudice and affectation, with the learned lumber that follows at their heels, because he could do without them. In taking up his pen he did not set up for a philosopher, wit, orator, or moralist, but he became all these by merely daring to tell us whatever passed through his mind, in its naked simplicity and force, that he thought any ways worth communicating. He did not, in the abstract character of an author, undertake to say all that could be said upon a subject, but what in his capacity as an inquirer after truth he happened to know about it. He was neither a pedant nor a bigot. He neither supposed that he was bound to know all things, nor that all things were bound to conform to what he had fancied or would have them to be. In treating of men and manners, he spoke of them as he found them, not according to preconceived notions and abstract dogmas; and he began by teaching us what he himself was. In criticising books he did not compare them with rules and systems, but told us what he saw to like or dislike in them. He did not take his standard of excellence "according to an exact scale" of Aristotle, or fall out with a work that was good for any thing, because "not one of the angles at the four corners was a right one." He was, in a word, the first author who was not a bookmaker, and who wrote not to make converts of others to established creeds and prejudices, but to satisfy his own mind of the truth of things. In this respect we know not which to be most charmed with, the author or the man. There is an inex-

pressible frankness and sincerity, as well as power, in what he writes. There is no attempt at imposition or concealment, no juggling tricks or solemn mouthing, no laboured attempts at proving himself always in the right, and every body else in the wrong; he says what is uppermost, lays open what floats at the top or the bottom of his mind, and deserves Pope's character of him, where he professes to

"—— pour out all as plain
As downright Shippen, or as old Montaigne." *

He does not converse with us like a pedagogue with his pupil, whom he wishes to make as great a blockhead as himself, but like a philosopher and friend who has passed through life with thought and observation, and is willing to enable others to pass through it with pleasure and profit. A writer of this stamp, I confess, appears to me as much superior to a common bookworm, as a library of real books is superior to a mere book-case, painted and lettered on the outside with the names of celebrated works. As he was the first to attempt this new way of writing, so the same strong natural impulse which prompted the undertaking, carried him to the end of his career. The same force and honesty of mind which urged him to throw off the shackles of custom and prejudice, would enable him to complete his triumph over them. He has left little for his successors to achieve in the way of just and original speculation on human life. Nearly all the thinking of the two last centuries of that kind which the French denominate *morale observatrice*, is to be found in Montaigne's Essays: there is the germ, at least, and generally much more. He sowed the seed and cleared away the rubbish, even where others have reaped the fruit, or cultivated and

* Why Pope should say in reference to him, "Or *more wise* Charron," is not easy to determine.

decorated the soil to a greater degree of nicety and perfection. There is no one to whom the old Latin adage is more applicable than to Montaigne, "*Pervent isti qui ante nos nostra dixerunt.*" There has been no new impulse given to thought since his time. Among the specimens of criticisms on authors which he has left us, are those on Virgil, Ovid, and Boccaccio, in the account of books which he thinks worth reading, or (which is the same thing) which he finds he can read in his old age, and which may be reckoned among the few criticisms which are worth reading at any age.*

*As an instance of his general power of reasoning, I shall give his chapter entitled *One Man's Profit is Another's Loss*, in which he has nearly anticipated Mandeville's celebrated paradox of private vices being public benefits:—

"Demades, the Athenian, condemned a fellow-citizen, who furnished out funerals, for demanding too great a price for his goods; and if he got an estate, it must be by the death of a great many people; but I think it a sentence ill grounded, forasmuch as no profit can be made, but at the expense of some other person, and that every kind of gain is by that rule liable to be condemned. The tradesman thrives by the debauchery of youth, and the farmer by the dearth of corn; the architect by the ruin of buildings, the officers of justice by quarrels and law-suits; nay, even the honour and functions of divines is owing to our mortality and vices. No physician takes pleasure in the health even of his best friends, said the ancient Greek comedian, nor soldier in the peace of his country; and so of the rest. And, what is yet worse, let every one but examine his own heart, and he will find, that his private wishes spring and grow up at the expense of some other person. Upon which consideration this thought came into my head, that nature does not hereby deviate from her general policy; for the naturalists hold, that the birth, nourishment, and increase of any one thing, is the decay and corruption of another:

*Nam quodcumque suis mutatum finibus erit,
Continuo hoc mors est illius, quod fuit ante, i.e.*

For what from its own confines chang'd doth pass,
Is straight the death of what before it was."

Vol. I, Chap. XXI.

Montaigne's Essays were translated into English by Charles Cotton, who was one of the wits and poets of the age of Charles II; and Lord Halifax, one of the noble critics of that day, declared it to be "the book in the world he was the best pleased with." This mode of familiar Essay-writing, free from the trammels of the schools, and the airs of professed authorship, was successfully imitated, about the same time, by Cowley and Sir William Temple, in their miscellaneous Essays, which are very agreeable and learned talking upon paper. Lord Shaftesbury, on the contrary, who aimed at the same easy, *déagé* mode of communicating his thoughts to the world, has quite spoiled his matter, which is sometimes valuable, by his manner, in which he carries a certain flaunting, flowery, figurative, flirting style of amicable condescension to the reader, to an excess more tantalising than the most starched and ridiculous formality of the age of James I. There is nothing so tormenting as the affectation of ease and freedom from affectation.

The ice being thus thawed, and the barrier that kept authors at a distance from common-sense and feeling broken through, the transition was not difficult from Montaigne and his imitators, to our Periodical Essayists. These last applied the same unrestrained expression of their thoughts to the more immediate and passing scenes of life, to temporary and local matters; and in order to discharge the invidious office of *Censor Morum* more freely, and with less responsibility, assumed some fictitious and humorous disguise, which, however, in a great degree corresponded to their own peculiar habits and character. By thus concealing their own name and person under the title of the Tatler, Spectator, etc. they were enabled to inform us more fully of what was passing in the world, while the dramatic contrast and ironical point of view to which the whole is

subjected, added a greater liveliness and *piquancy* to the descriptions. The philosopher and wit here commences newsmonger, makes himself master of "the perfect spy o' th' time," and from his various walks and turns through life, brings home little curious specimens of the humours, opinions, and manners of his contemporaries, as the botanist brings home different plants and weeds, or the mineralogist different shells and fossils, to illustrate their several theories, and be useful to mankind.

The first of these papers that was attempted in this country was set up by Steele in the beginning of the last century; and of all our Periodical Essayists, the *Tatler* (for that was the name he assumed) has always appeared to me the most amusing and agreeable. Montaigne, whom I have proposed to consider as the father of this kind of personal authorship among the moderns, in which the reader is admitted behind the curtain, and sits down with the writer in his gown and slippers, was a most magnanimous and undisguised egotist; but Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq. was the more disinterested gossip of the two. The French author is contented to describe the peculiarities of his own mind and constitution, which he does with a copious and unsparing hand. The English journalist good-naturedly lets you into the secret both of his own affairs and those of others. A young lady, on the other side Temple Bar, cannot be seen at her glass for half a day together, but Mr. Bickerstaff takes due notice of it; and he has the first intelligence of the symptoms of the *helle* passion appearing in any young gentleman at the West-end of the town. The departures and arrivals of widows with handsome jointures, either to bury their grief in the country, or to procure a second husband in town, are punctually recorded in his pages. He is well acquainted with the celebrated beauties of the preceding age at the court of Charles II; and the

old gentleman (as he feigns himself) often grows romantic in recounting "the disastrous strokes which his youth suffered" from the glances of their bright eyes, and their unaccountable caprices. In particular, he dwells with a secret satisfaction on the recollection of one of his mistresses, who left him for a richer rival, and whose constant reproach to her husband, on occasion of any quarrel between them, was "I, that might have married the famous Mr. Bickerstaff, to be treated in this manner!" The club at the Trumpet consists of a set of persons almost as well worth knowing as himself. The cavalcade of the justice of the peace, the knight of the shire, the country squire, and the young gentleman, his nephew, who came to wait on him at his chambers, in such form and ceremony, seem not to have settled the order of their precedence to this hour; * and I should hope that the upholsterer and his companions, who used to sun themselves in the Green Park, and who broke their rest and fortunes to maintain the balance of power in Europe, stand as fair a chance for immortality as some modern politicians. Mr. Bickerstaff himself is a gentleman and a scholar, a humourist, and a man of the world; with a great deal of nice easy *naïveté* about him. If he walks out and is caught in a shower of rain, he makes amends for this unlucky accident by a criticism on the shower in Virgil, and concludes with a burlesque copy of verses on a city-shower. He entertains us, when he dates from his own apartment, with a quotation from Plutarch, or a moral reflection; from the Grecian coffee-house with politics; and from Wills', or the Temple, with the poets and players, the beaux and men of wit and pleasure about town. In reading the pages of the Tatler, we seem as if suddenly carried back to the age of Queen Anne, of toupees and full-bottomed periwigs. The whole

* No. 125.

appearance of our dress and manners undergoes a delightful metamorphosis. The beaux and the belles are of a quite different species from what they are at present; we distinguish the dappers, the smarts, and the pretty fellows, as they pass by Mr. Lilly's shop-windows in the Strand; we are introduced to Betterton and Mrs. Oldfield behind the scenes; are made familiar with the persons and performances of Will Estcourt or Tom Durfey; we listen to a dispute at a tavern, on the merits of the Duke of Marlborough, or Marshal Turenne; or are present at the first rehearsal of a play by Vanbrugh, or the reading of a new poem by Mr. Pope. The privilege of thus virtually transporting ourselves to past times, is even greater than that of visiting distant places in reality. London, a hundred years ago, would be much better worth seeing than Paris at the present moment.

It will be said, that all this is to be found, in the same or a greater degree, in the *Spectator*. For myself, I do not think so; or at least, there is in the last work a much greater proportion of commonplace matter. I have, on this account, always preferred the *Tatler* to the *Spectator*. Whether it is owing to my having been earlier or better acquainted with the one than the other, my pleasure in reading these two admirable works is not in proportion to their comparative reputation. The *Tatler* contains only half the number of volumes, and, I will venture to say, nearly an equal quantity of sterling wit and sense. "The first sprightly runnings" are there; it has more of the original spirit, more of the freshness and stamp of nature. The indications of character and strokes of humour are more true and frequent; the reflections that suggest themselves arise more from the occasion, and are less spun out into regular dissertations. They are more like the remarks which occur in sensible conversation, and less like a lecture.

Something is left to the understanding of the reader. Steele seems to have gone into his closet chiefly to set down what he observed out of doors. Addison seems to have spent most of his time in his study, and to have spun out and wire-drawn the hints, which he borrowed from Steele, or took from nature, to the utmost. I am far from wishing to depreciate Addison's talents, but I am anxious to do justice to Steele, who was, I think, upon the whole, a less artificial and more original writer. The humorous descriptions of Steele resemble loose sketches, or fragments of a comedy; those of Addison are rather comments or ingenious paraphrases on the genuine text. The characters of the club, not only in the *Tatler*, but in the *Spectator*, were drawn by Steele. That of Sir Roger de Coverley is among the number. Addison has, however, gained himself immortal honour by his manner of filling up this last character. Who is there that can forget, or be insensible to, the inimitable nameless graces and varied traits of nature and of old English character in it—to his unpretending virtues and amiable weaknesses—to his modesty, generosity, hospitality, and eccentric whims—to the respect of his neighbours, and the affection of his domestics—to his wayward, hopeless, secret passion for his fair enemy, the widow, in which there is more of real romance and true delicacy than in a thousand tales of knight-errantry—(we perceive the hectic flush of his cheek, the faltering of his tongue in speaking of her bewitching airs and "the whiteness of her hand")—to the havoc he makes among the game in his neighbourhood—to his speech from the bench, to shew the *Spectator* what is thought of him in the country—to his unwillingness to be put up as a sign-post, and his having his own likeness turned into the Saracen's head—to his gentle reproof of the baggage of a gipsy that tells him "he has a widow in his line of life"—to his doubts as to the existence of witch-

craft, and protection of reputed witches—to his account of the family pictures, and his choice of a chaplain—to his falling asleep at church, and his reproof of John Williams, as soon as he recovered from his nap, for talking in sermon-time. The characters of Will. Wimble and Will. Honeycomb are not a whit behind their friend, Sir Roger, in delicacy and felicity. The delightful simplicity and good-humoured officiousness in the one, are set off by the graceful affectation and courtly pretension in the other. How long since I first became acquainted with these two characters in the *Spectator*! What old-fashioned friends they seem, and yet I am not tired of them, like so many other friends, nor they of me! How airy these abstractions of the poet's pen stream over the dawn of our acquaintance with human life! how they glance their fairest colours on the prospect before us! how pure they remain in it to the last, like the rainbow in the evening-cloud, which the rude hand of time and experience can neither soil nor dissipate! What a pity that we cannot find the reality, and yet if we did, the dream would be over. I once thought I knew a Will. Wimble, and a Will. Honeycomb, but they turned out but indifferently; the originals in the *Spectator* still read, word for word, the same that they always did. We have only to turn to the page, and find them where we left them!—Many of the most exquisite pieces in the *Tatler*, it is to be observed, are Addison's, as the Court of Honour, and the Personification of Musical Instruments, with almost all those papers that form regular sets or series. I do not know whether the picture of the family of an old college acquaintance, in the *Tatler*, where the children run to let Mr. Bickerstaff in at the door, and where the one that loses the race that way, turns back to tell the father that he is come; with the nice gradation of incredulity in the little boy who is got into Guy of Warwick, and the Seven

Champions, and who shakes his head at the improbability of Æsop's Fables, is Steele's or Addison's, though I believe it belongs to the former. The account of the two sisters, one of whom held up her head higher than ordinary, from having on a pair of flowered garters, and that of the married lady who complained to the Tatler of the neglect of her husband, with her answers to some *home* questions that were put to her, are unquestionably Steele's.—If the Tatler is not inferior to the Spectator as a record of manners and character, it is superior to it in the interest of many of the stories. Several of the incidents related there by Steele have never been surpassed in the heart-rending pathos of private distress. I might refer to those of the lover and his mistress, when the theatre, in which they were, caught fire; of the bridegroom, who by accident kills his bride on the day of their marriage; the story of Mr. Eustace and his wife; and the fine dream about his own mistress when a youth. What has given its superior reputation to the Spectator, is the greater gravity of its pretensions, its moral dissertations and critical reasonings, by which I confess myself less edified than by other things, which are thought more lightly of. Systems and opinions change, but nature is always true. It is the moral and didactic tone of the Spectator which makes us apt to think of Addison (according to Mandeville's sarcasm) as "a parson in a tie-wig." Many of his moral Essays are, however, exquisitely beautiful and quite happy. Such are the reflections on cheerfulness, those in Westminster Abbey, on the Royal Exchange, and particularly some very affecting ones on the death of a young lady in the fourth volume. These, it must be allowed, are the perfection of elegant sermonising. His critical Essays are not so good. I prefer Steele's occasional selection of beautiful poetical passages, without any affectation of analysing their beauties, to Addison's finer-

spun theories. The best criticism in the *Spectator*, that on the Cartoons of Raphael, of which Mr. Fuseli has availed himself with great spirit in his Lectures, is by Steele.* I owed this acknowledgment to a writer who has so often put me in good humour with myself, and every thing about me, when few things else could, and when the tomes of casuistry and ecclesiastical history, with which the little duodecimo volumes of the *Tatler* were overwhelmed and surrounded, in the only library to which I had access when a boy, had tried their tranquillising effects upon me in vain. I had not long ago in my hands, by favour of a friend, an original copy of the quarto edition of the *Tatler*, with a list of the subscribers. It is curious to see some names there which we should hardly think of (that of Sir Isaac Newton is among them,) and also to observe the degree of interest excited by those of the different persons, which is not determined according to the rules of the *Herald's College*. One literary name lasts as long as a whole race of heroes and their descendants! The *Guardian*, which followed the *Spectator*, was, as may be supposed, inferior to it.

The dramatic and conversational turn which forms the distinguishing feature and greatest charm of the *Spectator* and *Tatler*, is quite lost in the *Rambler* by Dr. Johnson. There is no reflected light thrown on human life from an assumed character, nor any direct one from a display of the author's own. The *Tatler* and *Spectator* are, as it were, made up of notes and memorandums of the events and incidents of the day, with finished studies after nature, and characters fresh from the life, which the writer moralises

* The antithetical style and verbal paradoxes which Burke was so fond of, in which the epithet is a seeming contradiction to the substantive, such as "proud submission and dignified obedience," are, I think, first to be found in the *Tatler*.

upon, and turns to account as they come before him: the Rambler is a collection of moral Essays, or scholastic theses, written on set subjects, and of which the individual characters and incidents are merely artificial illustrations, brought in to give a pretended relief to the dryness of didactic discussion. The Rambler is a splendid and imposing common-place-book of general topics, and rhetorical declamation on the conduct and business of human life. In this sense, there is hardly a reflection that has been suggested on such subjects which is not to be found in this celebrated work, and there is, perhaps, hardly a reflection to be found in it which had not been already suggested and developed by some other author, or in the common course of conversation. The mass of intellectual wealth here heaped together is immense, but it is rather the result of gradual accumulation, the produce of the general intellect, labouring in the mine of knowledge and reflection, than dug out of the quarry, and dragged into the light by the industry and sagacity of a single mind. I am not here saying that Dr. Johnson was a man without originality, compared with the ordinary run of men's minds, but he was not a man of original thought or genius, in the sense in which Montaigne or Lord Bacon was. He opened no new vein of precious ore, nor did he light upon any single pebbles of uncommon size and unrivalled lustre. We seldom meet with anything to "give us pause;" he does not set us thinking for the first time. His reflections present themselves like reminiscences; do not disturb the ordinary march of our thoughts; arrest our attention by the stateliness of their appearance, and the costliness of their garb, but pass on and mingle with the throng of our impressions. After closing the volumes of the Rambler, there is nothing that we remember as a new truth gained to the mind, nothing indelibly stamped upon the memory; nor is there

any passage that we wish to turn to as embodying any known principle or observation, with such force and beauty that justice can only be done to the idea in the author's own words. Such, for instance, are many of the passages to be found in Burke, which shine by their own light, belong to no class, have neither equal nor counterpart, and of which we say that no one but the author could have written them! There is neither the same boldness of design, nor mastery of execution in Johnson. In the one, the spark of genius seems to have met with its congenial matter; the shaft is sped; the forked lightning dresses up the face of nature in ghastly smiles, and the loud thunder rolls far away from the ruin that is made. Dr. Johnson's style, on the contrary, resembles rather the rumbling of mimic thunder at one of our theatres; and the light he throws upon a subject is like the dazzling effect of phosphorus, or an *ignis fatuus* of words. There is a wide difference, however, between perfect originality and perfect common-place: neither ideas nor expressions are trite or vulgar because they are not quite new. They are valuable, and ought to be repeated, if they have not become quite common; and Johnson's style both of reasoning and imagery holds the middle rank between startling novelty and vapid common-place. Johnson has as much originality of thinking as Addison; but then he wants his familiarity of illustration, knowledge of character, and delightful humour. What most distinguishes Dr. Johnson from other writers is the pomp and uniformity of his style. All his periods are cast in the same mould, are of the same size and shape, and consequently have little fitness to the variety of things he professes to treat of. His subjects are familiar, but the author is always upon stilts. He has neither ease nor simplicity, and his efforts at playfulness, in part, remind one of the lines in Milton:—

“—The elephant
To make them sport wreath'd his proboscis lithe.”

His Letters from Correspondents, in particular, are more pompous and unwieldy than what he writes in his own person. This want of relaxation and variety of manner has, I think, after the first effects of novelty and surprise were over, been prejudicial to the matter. It takes from the general power, not only to please, but to instruct. The monotony of style produces an apparent monotony of ideas. What is really striking and valuable, is lost in the vain ostentation and circumlocution of the expression; for when we find the same pains and pomp of diction bestowed upon the most trifling as upon the most important parts of a sentence or discourse, we grow tired of distinguishing between pretension and reality, and are disposed to confound the tinsel and bombast of the phraseology with want of weight in the thoughts. Thus, from the imposing and oracular nature of the style, people are tempted at first to imagine that our author's speculations are all wisdom and profundity: till having found out their mistake in some instances, they suppose that there is nothing but common-place in them, concealed under verbiage and pedantry; and in both they are wrong. The fault of Dr. Johnson's style is, that it reduces all things to the same artificial and unmeaning level. It destroys all shades of difference, the association between words and things. It is a perpetual paradox and innovation. He condescends to the familiar till we are ashamed of our interest in it: he expands the little till it looks big. “If he were to write a fable of little fishes,” as Goldsmith said of him, “he would make them speak like great whales.” We can no more distinguish the most familiar objects in his descriptions of them, than we can a well-known face under a huge painted mask. The structure of his sentences, which was his own invention, and which has been generally imi-

tated since his time, is a species of rhyming in prose, where one clause answers to another in measure and quantity, like the tagging of syllables at the end of a verse; the close of the period follows as mechanically as the oscillation of a pendulum, the sense is balanced with the sound; each sentence, revolving round its centre of gravity, is contained with itself like a couplet, and each paragraph forms itself into a stanza. Dr. Johnson is also a complete balancemaster in the topics of morality. He never encourages hope, but he counteracts it by fear; he never elicits a truth, but he suggests some objection in answer to it. He seizes and alternately quits the clue of reason, lest it should involve him in the labyrinths of endless error; he wants confidence in himself and his fellows. He dares not trust himself with the immediate impressions of things, for fear of compromising his dignity; or follow them into their consequences, for fear of committing his prejudices. His timidity is the result, not of ignorance, but of morbid apprehension. "He runs the great circle, and is still at home." No advance is made by his writings in any sentiment, or mode of reasoning. Out of the pale of established authority and received dogmas, all is sceptical, loose, and desultory; he seems in imagination to strengthen the dominion of prejudice, as he weakens and dissipates that of reason; and round the rock of faith and power, on the edge of which he slumbers blindfold and uneasy, the waves and billows of uncertain and dangerous opinion roar and heave for evermore. His *Rasselas* is the most melancholy and debilitating moral speculation that ever was put forth. Doubtful of the faculties of his mind, as of his organs of vision, Johnson trusted only to his feelings and his fears. He cultivated a belief in witches as an out-guard to the evidences of religion; and abused Milton, and patronised Lauder, in spite of his aversion to his countrymen, as a step

to secure the existing establishment in church and state. This was neither right feeling nor sound logic.

The most triumphant record of the talents and character of Johnson is to be found in Boswell's *Life of him*. The man was superior to the author. When he threw aside his pen, which he regarded as an incumbrance, he became not only learned and thoughtful, but acute, witty, humorous, natural, honest; hearty and determined, "the king of good fellows and wale of old men." There are as many smart repartees, profound remarks, and keen invectives to be found in Boswell's "inventory of all he said," as are recorded of any celebrated man. The life and dramatic play of his conversation forms a contrast to his written works. His natural powers and undisguised opinions were called out in convivial intercourse. In public, he practised with the foils on: in private, he unsheathed the sword of controversy, and it was "the Ebro's temper." The eagerness of opposition roused him from his natural sluggishness and acquired timidity; he returned blow for blow; and whether the trial were of argument or wit, none of his rivals could boast much of the encounter. Burke seems to have been the only person who had a chance with him; and it is the unpardonable sin of Boswell's work, that he has purposely omitted their combats of strength and skill. Goldsmith asked, "Does he wind into a subject like a serpent, as Burke does?" And when exhausted with sickness, he himself said, "If that fellow Burke were here now, he would kill me." It is to be observed, that Johnson's colloquial style was as blunt, direct, and downright, as his style of studied composition was involved and circuitous. As when Topham Beauclerc and Langton knocked him up at his chambers, at three in the morning, and he came to the door with the poker in his hand, but seeing them, exclaimed, "What, is it you, my lads? then I'll have a frisk with you!" and

he afterwards reproaches Langton, who was a literary milkop, for leaving them to go to an engagement "with some *un-ideal* girls." What words to come from the mouth of the great moralist and lexicographer! His good deeds were as many as his good sayings. His domestic habits, his tenderness to servants, and readiness to oblige his friends; the quantity of strong tea that he drank to keep down sad thoughts; his many labours reluctantly begun, and irresolutely laid aside; his honest acknowledgment of his own, and indulgence to the weaknesses of others; his throwing himself back in the post-chaise with Boswell, and saying, "Now I think I am a good-humoured fellow," though nobody thought him so, and yet he was; his quitting the society of Garrick and his actresses, and his reason for it; his dining with Wilkes, and his kindness to Goldsmith; his sitting with the young ladies on his knee at the Mitre, to give them good advice, in which situation, if not explained, he might be taken for Falstaff; and last and noblest, his carrying the unfortunate victim of disease and dissipation on his back up through Fleet Street, (an act which realises the parable of the good Samaritan)—all these, and innumerable others, endear him to the reader, and must be remembered to his lasting honour. He had faults, but they lie buried with him. He had his prejudices and his intolerant feelings; but he suffered enough in the conflict of his own mind with them. For if no man can be happy in the free exercise of his reason, no wise man can be happy without it. His were not time-serving, heartless, hypocritical prejudices; but deep, invoven, not to be rooted out but with life and hope, which he found from old habit necessary to his own peace of mind, and thought so to the peace of mankind. I do not hate, but love him for them. They were between himself and his conscience; and should be left to that higher tribunal, "where they in

trembling hope repose, the bosom of his Father and his God." In a word, he has left behind him few wiser or better men.

The herd of his imitators shewed what he was by their disproportionate effects. The Periodical Essayists, that succeeded the Rambler, are, and deserve to be, little read at present. The Adventurer, by Hawksworth, is completely trite and vapid, aping all the faults of Johnson's style, without any thing to atone for them. The sentences are often absolutely unmeaning; and one half of each might regularly be left blank. The World, and Connoisseur, which followed, are a little better; and in the last of these there is one good idea, that of a man in indifferent health, who judges of every one's title to respect from their possession of this blessing, and bows to a sturdy beggar with sound limbs and a florid complexion, while he turns his back upon a lord who is a valetudinarian.

Goldsmith's Citizen of the World, like all his works, bears the stamp of the author's mind. It does not "go about to cozen reputation without the stamp of merit." He is more observing, more original, more natural and picturesque than Johnson. His work is written on the model of the Persian Letters; and contrives to give an abstracted and somewhat perplexing view of things, by opposing foreign prepossessions to our own, and thus stripping objects of their customary disguises. Whether truth is elicited in this collision of contrary absurdities, I do not know; but I confess the process is too ambiguous and full of intricacy to be very amusing to my plain understanding. For light summer reading, it is like walking in a garden full of traps and pitfalls. It necessarily gives rise to paradoxes, and there are some very bold ones in the Essays, which would subject an author less established to no very agreeable sort of *censura literaria*. Thus the Chinese philosopher exclaims

very unadvisedly. "The bonzes and priests of all religions keep up superstition and imposture; all reformations begin with the laity." Goldsmith, however, was staunch in his practical creed, and might bolt speculative extravagances with impunity. There is a striking difference in this respect between him and Addison, who, if he attacked authority, took care to have common sense on his side, and never hazarded anything offensive to the feelings of others, or on the strength of his own discretionary opinion. There is another inconvenience in this assumption of an exotic character and tone of sentiment, that it produces an inconsistency between the knowledge which the individual has time to acquire, and which the author is bound to communicate. Thus the Chinese has not been in England three days before he is acquainted with the characters of the three countries which compose this kingdom, and describes them to his friend at Canton, by extracts from the newspapers of each metropolis. The nationality of Scotchmen is thus ridiculed:—"Edinburgh. We are positive when we say, that Sanders Macgregor, lately executed for horse-stealing, is not a native of Scotland, but born at Carrickfergus." Now this is very good; but how should our Chinese philosopher find it out by instinct? Beau Tibbs, a prominent character in this little work, is the best comic sketch since the time of Addison; unrivalled in his finery, his vanity, and his poverty.

I have only to mention the names of the *Longer* and the *Mirror*, which are ranked by the author's admirers with *Sterne* for sentiment, and with Addison for humour. I shall not enter into that; but I know that the story of *La Roche* is not like the story of *Le Fevre*, nor one hundredth part so good. Do I say this from prejudice to the author? No; for I have read his novels. Of the *Man of the World* I cannot think so favourably as some others; nor shall I

here dwell on the picturesque and romantic beauties of Julia de Roubigné, the early favourite of the author of *Rosamond Gray*; but of the *Man of Feeling* I would speak with grateful recollections: nor is it possible to forget the sensitive, irresolute, interesting Harley; and that lone figure of Miss Walton in it, that floats in the horizon, dim and ethereal, the day-dream of her lover's youthful fancy—better, far better than all the realities of life!

VIII

THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS

THERE is an exclamation in one of Gray's Letters—"Be mine to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon!"—If I did not utter a similar aspiration at the conclusion of the last new novel which I read (I would not give offence by being more particular as to the name) it was not from any want of affection for the class of writing to which it belongs: for, without going so far as the celebrated French philosopher, who thought that more was to be learnt from good novels and romances than from the gravest treatises on history and morality, yet there are few works to which I am oftener tempted to turn for profit or delight, than to the standard productions in this species of composition. We find there a close imitation of men and manners; we see the very web and texture of society as it really exists, and as we meet with it when we come into the world. If poetry has "something more divine in it," this savours more of humanity. We are brought acquainted with the motives and characters of mankind, imbibe our notions of virtue and vice from practical examples, and are taught a knowledge of the world through the airy medium of romance. As a record of past manners and opinions, too, such writings afford the best and fullest information. For example, I should be at a loss where to find in any authentic documents of the same period so satisfactory an account of the general state of society, and of moral, political, and religious feeling in the reign of

George II, as we meet with in the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his friend Mr. Abraham Adams. This work, indeed, I take to be a perfect piece of statistics in its kind. In looking into any regular history of that period, into a learned and eloquent charge to a grand jury or the clergy of a diocese, or into a tract on controversial divinity, we should hear only of the ascendancy of the Protestant succession, the horrors of Popery, the triumph of civil and religious liberty, the wisdom and moderation of the sovereign, the happiness of the subject, and the flourishing state of manufactures and commerce. But if we really wish to know what all these fine-sounding names come to, we cannot do better than turn to the works of those, who having no other object than to imitate nature, could only hope for success from the fidelity of their pictures; and were bound (in self-defence) to reduce the boasts of vague theorists and the exaggerations of angry disputants to the mortifying standard of reality. Extremes are said to meet: and the works of imagination, as they are called, sometimes come the nearest to truth and nature. Fielding in speaking on this subject, and vindicating the use and dignity of the style of writing in which he excelled against the loftier pretensions of professed historians, says that in their productions nothing is true but the names and dates, whereas in his everything is true but the names and dates. If so, he has the advantage on his side.

I will here confess, however, that I am a little prejudiced on the point in question; and that the effect of many fine speculations has been lost upon me, from an early familiarity with the most striking passages in the work to which I have just alluded. Thus nothing can be more captivating than the description somewhere given by Mr. Burke of the indissoluble connection between learning and nobility; and of the respect universally paid by wealth to piety and

morals. But the effect of this ideal representation has always been spoiled by my recollection of Parson Adams sitting over his cup of ale in Sir Thomas Booby's kitchen. Echard "On the Contempt of the Clergy" is, in like manner, a very good book, and "worthy of all acceptance:" but, somehow, an unlucky impression of the reality of Parson Trulliber involuntarily checks the emotions of respect, to which it might otherwise give rise: while, on the other hand, the lecture which Lady Booby reads to Lawyer Scout on the immediate expulsion of Joseph and Fanny from the parish casts no very favourable light on the flattering accounts of our practical jurisprudence which are to be found in Blackstone or De Lolme. The most moral writers, after all, are those who do not pretend to inculcate any moral. The professed moralist almost unavoidably degenerates into the partisan of a system; and the philosopher is too apt to warp the evidence to his own purpose. But the painter of manners gives the facts of human nature, and leaves us to draw the inference: if we are not able to do this, or do it ill, at least it is our own fault.

The first-rate writers in this class, of course, are few; but those few we may reckon among the greatest ornaments and best benefactors of our kind. There is a certain set of them who, as it were, take their rank by the side of reality, and are appealed to as evidence on all questions concerning human nature. The principal of these are Cervantes and Le Sage, who may be considered as having been naturalised among ourselves; and, of native English growth, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, and Sterne.* As

* It is not to be forgotten that the author of Robinson Crusoe was also an Englishman. His other works, such as the Life of Colonel Jack, &c., are of the same cast, and leave an impression on the mind more like that of things than words.

this is a department of criticism which deserves more attention than has been usually bestowed upon it, I shall here venture to recur (not from choice, but necessity) to what I have said upon it in a well-known periodical publication; and endeavour to contribute my mite towards settling the standard of excellence, both as to degree and kind, in these several writers. . . .

There is very little to warrant the common idea that Fielding was an imitator of Cervantes, except his own declaration of such an intention in the title-page of Joseph Andrews, the romantic turn of the character of Parson Adams (the only romantic character in his works), and the proverbial humour of Partridge, which is kept up only for a few pages. Fielding's novels are, in general, thoroughly his own; and they are thoroughly English. What they are most remarkable for, is neither sentiment, nor imagination, nor wit, nor even humour, though there is an immense deal of this last quality; but profound knowledge of human nature, at least of English nature; and masterly pictures of the characters of men as he saw them existing. This quality distinguishes all his works, and is shown almost equally in all of them. As a painter of real life, he was equal to Hogarth; as a mere observer of human nature, he was little inferior to Shakspeare, though without any of the genius and poetical qualities of his mind. His humour is less rich and laughable than Smollett's; his wit as often misses as hits; he has none of the fine pathos of Richardson or Sterne; but he has brought together a greater variety of characters in common life, marked with more distinct peculiarities, and without an atom of caricature, than any other novel writer whatever. The extreme subtlety of observation on the springs of human conduct in ordinary characters, is only equalled by the ingenuity of contrivance in bringing those springs into play, in such a manner as

to lay open their smallest irregularity. The detection is always complete, and made with the certainty and skill of a philosophical experiment, and the obviousness and familiarity of a casual observation. The truth of the imitation is indeed so great, that it has been argued that Fielking must have had his materials ready-made to his hands, and was merely a transcriber of local manners and individual habits. For this conjecture, however, there seems to be no foundation. His representations, it is true, are local and individual; but they are not the less profound and conclusive. The feeling of the general principles of human nature, operating in particular circumstances, is always intense, and uppermost in his mind; and he makes use of incident and situation only to bring out character.

It is scarcely necessary to give any illustrations. Tom Jones is full of them. There is the account, for example, of the gratitude of the elder Blifil to his brother, for assisting him to obtain the fortune of Miss Bridget Alworthy by marriage; and of the gratitude of the poor in his neighbourhood to Alworthy himself, who had done so much good in the country that he had made every one in it his enemy. There is the account of the Latin dialogues between Partridge and his maid, of the assault made on him during one of these by Mrs. Partridge, and the severe bruises he patiently received on that occasion, after which the parish of Little Baddington rung with the story, that the school-master had killed his wife. There is the exquisite keeping in the character of Blifil, and the want of it in that of Jones. There is the gradation in the lovers of Molly Seagrim; the philosopher Square succeeding to Tom Jones, who again finds that he himself had succeeded to the accomplished Will. Barnes, who had the first possession of her person, and had still possession of her heart, Jones being only the instrument of her vanity, as Square was of her

interest. Then there is the discreet honesty of Black George, the learning of Thwackum and Square, and the profundity of Squire Western, who considered it as a physical impossibility that his daughter should fall in love with Tom Jones. We have also that gentleman's disputes with his sister, and the inimitable appeal of that lady to her niece.—“I was never so handsome as you, Sophy: yet I had something of you formerly. I was called the cruel Parthenissa. Kingdoms and states, as Tully Cicero says, undergo alteration, and so must the human form!” The adventure of the same lady with the highwayman, who robbed her of her jewels while he complimented her beauty, ought not to be passed over, nor that of Sophia and her muff, nor the reserved coquetry of her cousin Fitzpatrick, nor the description of Lady Bellaston, nor the modest overtures of the pretty widow Hunt, nor the indiscreet babblings of Mrs. Honour. The moral of this book has been objected to, without much reason; but a more serious objection has been made to the want of refinement and elegance in two principal characters. We never feel this objection, indeed, while we are reading the book; but at other times we have something like a lurking suspicion that Jones was but an awkward fellow, and Sophia a pretty simpleton. I do not know how to account for this effect, unless it is that Fielding's constantly assuring us of the beauty of his hero, and the good sense of his heroine, at last produces a distrust of both. The story of Tom Jones is allowed to be unrivalled: and it is this circumstance, together with the vast variety of characters, that has given the History of a Foundling so decided a preference over Fielding's other novels. The characters themselves, both in Amelia and Joseph Andrews, are quite equal to any of those in Tom Jones. The account of Miss Matthews and Ensign Hibbert, in the former of these; the way in which that lady recon-

ciles herself to the death of her father; the inflexible Colonel Bath; the insipid Mrs. James, the complaisant Colonel Trent, the demure, sly, intriguing, equivocal Mrs. Bennet, the lord who is her seducer, and who attempts afterwards to seduce Amelia by the same mechanical process of a concert-ticket, a book, and the disguise of a great-coat; his little, fat, short-nosed, red-faced, good-humoured accomplice, the keeper of the lodging-house, who, having no pretensions to gallantry herself, has a disinterested delight in forwarding the intrigues and pleasures of others (to say nothing of honest Atkinson, the story of the miniature-picture of Amelia, and the hashed mutton, which are in a different style,) are masterpieces of description. The whole scene at the lodging-house, the masquerade, etc., in *Amelia*, are equal in interest to the parallel scenes in *Tom Jones*, and even more refined in the knowledge of character. For instance, Mrs. Bennet is superior to Mrs. Fitzpatrick in her own way. The uncertainty, in which the event of her interview with her former seducer is left, is admirable. Fielking was a master of what may be called the *double entendre* of character, and surprises you no less by what he leaves in the dark, (hardly known to the persons themselves) than by the unexpected discoveries he makes of the real traits and circumstances in a character with which, till then, you find you were unacquainted. There is nothing at all heroic, however, in the usual style of his delineations. He does not draw lofty characters or strong passions; all his persons are of the ordinary stature as to intellect; and possess little elevation of fancy, or energy of purpose. Perhaps, after all, Parson Adams is his finest character. It is equally true to nature, and more ideal than any of the others. Its unsuspecting simplicity makes it not only more amiable, but doubly amusing, by gratifying the sense of superior sagacity in the reader. Our laughing at him does

not once lessen our respect for him. His declaring that he would willingly walk ten miles to fetch his sermon on vanity, merely to convince Wilson of his thorough contempt of this vice, and his consoling himself for the loss of his *Æschylus*, by suddenly recollecting that he could not read it if he had it, because it is dark, are among the finest touches of *naïveté*. The night-adventures at Lady Booby's with Beau Didapper, and the amiable Slipslop, are the most ludicrous; and that with the huntsman, who draws off the hounds from the poor Parson, because they would be spoiled by following *vermin*, the most profound. Fielding did not often repeat himself; but Dr. Harrison, in *Amelia*, may be considered as a variation of the character of Adams: so also is Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield; and the latter part of that work, which sets out so delightfully, an almost entire plagiarism from Wilson's account of himself, and Adams's domestic history.

Smollett's first novel, *Roderick Random*, which is also his best, appeared about the same time as Fielding's *Tom Jones*; and yet it has a much more modern air with it: but this may be accounted for from the circumstance that Smollett was quite a young man at the time, whereas Fielding's manner must have been formed long before. The style of *Roderick Random* is more easy and flowing than that of *Tom Jones*; the incidents follow one another more rapidly (though, it must be confessed, they never come in such a throng, or are brought out with the same dramatic effect); the humour is broader, and as effectual; and there is very nearly, if not quite, an equal interest excited by the story. What, then, is it that gives the superiority to Fielding? It is the superior insight into the springs of human character, and the constant developement of that character through every change of circumstance. Smollett's humour often arises from the situation of the persons, or the pecul-

ilarity of their external appearance; as, from Roderick Random's carrotty locks, which hung down over his shoulders like a pound of candles, or Strap's ignorance of London, and the blunders that follow from it. There is a tone of vulgarity about all his productions. The incidents frequently resemble detached anecdotes taken from a newspaper or magazine; and, like those in *Gil Blas*, might happen to a hundred other characters. He exhibits the ridiculous accidents and reverses to which human life is liable, not "the stuff" of which it is composed. He seldom probes to the quick, or penetrates beyond the surface; and, therefore, he leaves no stings in the minds of his readers, and in this respect is far less interesting than Fielding. His novels always enliven, and never tire us; we take them up with pleasure, and lay them down without any strong feeling of regret. We look on and laugh, as spectators of a highly amusing scene, without closing in with the combatants, or being made parties in the event. We read Roderick Random as an entertaining story; for the particular accidents and modes of life which it describes have ceased to exist; but we regard *Tom Jones* as a real history; because the author never stops short of those essential principles which lie at the bottom of all our actions, and in which we feel an immediate interest—*intus et in cute*. Smollett excels most as the lively caricaturist; Fielding as the exact painter and profound metaphysician. I am far from maintaining that this account applies uniformly to the productions of these two writers; but I think that, as far as they essentially differ, what I have stated is the general distinction between them. Roderick Random is the purest of Smollett's novels; I mean in point of style and description. Most of the incidents and characters are supposed to have been taken from the events of his own life; and are, therefore, truer to nature. There is a rude conception

of generosity in some of his characters, of which Fielding seems to have been incapable, his amiable persons being merely good-natured. It is owing to this that Strap is superior to Partridge; as there is a heartiness and warmth of feeling in some of the scenes between Lieutenant Bowling and his nephew, which is beyond Fielding's power of impassioned writing. The whole of the scene on ship-board is a most admirable and striking picture, and, I imagine, very little if at all exaggerated, though the interest it excites is of a very unpleasant kind, because the irritation and resistance to petty oppression can be of no avail. The picture of the little profligate French friar, who was Roderick's travelling companion, and of whom he always kept to the windward, is one of Smollett's most masterly sketches. Peregrine Pickle is no great favourite of mine, and Launcelot Greaves was not worthy of the genius of the author.

Humphry Clinker and Count Fathom are both equally admirable in their way. Perhaps the former is the most pleasant gossiping novel that ever was written; that which gives the most pleasure with the least effort to the reader. It is quite as amusing as going the journey could have been; and we have just as good an idea of what happened on the road, as if we had been of the party. Humphry Clinker himself is exquisite; and his sweetheart, Winifred Jenkins, not much behind him. Matthew Bramble, though not altogether original, is excellently supported, and seems to have been the prototype of Sir Anthony Absolute in the Rivals. But Lismahago is the flower of the flock. His tenaciousness in argument is not so delightful as the relaxation of his logical severity, when he finds his fortune mellowing in the wintry smiles of Mrs. Tabitha Bramble. This is the best-preserved and most severe of all Smollett's characters. The resemblance to Don Quixote is only just enough to make it

interesting to the critical reader, without giving offence to any body else. The indecency and filth in this novel are what must be allowed to all Smollett's writings.—The subject and characters in *Count Fathom* are, in general, exceedingly disgusting: the story is also spun out to a degree of tediousness in the serious and sentimental parts; but there is more power of writing occasionally shewn in it than in any of his works. I need only refer to the fine and bitter irony of the Count's address to the country of his ancestors on his landing in England; to the robber-scene in the forest, which has never been surpassed; to the Parisian swindler who personates a raw English country squire (*Western* is tame in the comparison); and to the story of the seduction in the west of England. It would be difficult to point out, in any author, passages written with more force and mastery than these.

It is not a very difficult undertaking to class *Fielding* or *Smollett*;—the one as an observer of the characters of human life, the other as a describer of its various eccentricities. But it is by no means so easy to dispose of *Richardson*, who was neither an observer of the one, nor a describer of the other; but who seemed to spin his materials entirely out of his own brain, as if there had been nothing existing in the world beyond the little room in which he sat writing. There is an artificial reality about his works, which is no where else to be met with. They have the romantic air of a pure fiction, with the literal minuteness of a common diary. The author had the strongest matter-of-fact imagination that ever existed, and wrote the oddest mixture of poetry and prose. He does not appear to have taken advantage of anything in actual nature, from one end of his works to the other; and yet, throughout all his works, voluminous as they are—(and this, to be sure, is one reason why they are so.)—he sets about describing

every object and transaction, as if the whole had been given in on evidence by an eye-witness. This kind of high finishing from imagination is an anomaly in the history of human genius; and, certainly, nothing so fine was ever produced by the same accumulation of minute parts. There is not the least distraction, the least forgetfulness of the end: every circumstance is made to tell. I cannot agree that this exactness of detail produces heaviness; on the contrary, it gives an appearance of truth, and a positive interest to the story; and we listen with the same attention as we should to the particulars of a confidential communication. I at one time used to think some parts of Sir Charles Grandison rather trifling and tedious, especially the long description of Miss Harriet Byron's wedding-clothes, till I was told of two young ladies who had severally copied out the whole of that very description for their own private gratification. After that, I could not blame the author.

The effect of reading this work is like an increase of kindred. You find yourself all of a sudden introduced into the midst of a large family, with aunts and cousins to the third and fourth generation, and grandmothers both by the father's and mother's side;—and a very odd set of people they are, but people whose real existence and personal identity you can no more dispute than your own senses, for you see and hear all that they do or say. What is still more extraordinary, all this extreme elaborateness in working out the story, seems to have cost the author nothing; for it is said, that the published works are mere abridgments. I have heard (though this I suspect must be a pleasant exaggeration) that Sir Charles Grandison was originally written in eight and twenty volumes.

Pamela is the first of Richardson's productions, and the very child of his brain. Taking the general idea of the character of a modest and beautiful country girl, and of

the ordinary situation in which she is placed, he makes out all the rest, even to the smallest circumstance, by the mere force of a reasoning imagination. It would seem as if a step lost, would be as fatal here as in a mathematical demonstration. The development of the character is the most simple, and comes the nearest to nature that it can do, without being the same thing. The interest of the story increases with the dawn of understanding and reflection in the heroine: her sentiments gradually expand themselves, like opening flowers. She writes better every time, and acquires a confidence in herself, just as a girl would do, writing such letters in such circumstances; and yet it is certain *that no girl would write such letters in such circumstances*. What I mean is this:—Richardson's nature is always the nature of sentiment and reflection, not of impulse or situation. He furnishes his characters, on every occasion, with the presence of mind of the author. He makes them act, not as they would from the impulse of the moment, but as they might upon reflection, and upon a careful review of every motive and circumstance in their situation. They regularly sit down to write letters: and if the business of life consisted in letter-writing, and was carried on by the post (like a Spanish game at chess), human nature would be what Richardson represents it. All actual objects and feelings are blunted and deadened by being presented through a medium which may be true to reason, but is false in nature. He confounds his own point of view with that of the immediate actors in the scene; and hence presents you with a conventional and factitious nature, instead of that which is real. Dr. Johnson seems to have preferred this truth of reflection to the truth of nature, when he said that there was more knowledge of the human heart in a page of Richardson, than in all Fielding. Fielding, however, saw more of the practical results, and understood

the principles as well; but he had not the same power of speculating upon their possible results, and combining them in certain ideal forms of passion and imagination, which was Richardson's real excellence.

It must be observed, however, that it is this mutual good understanding, and comparing of notes between the author and the persons he describes; his infinite circumspection, his exact process of ratiocination and calculation, which gives such an appearance of coldness and formality to most of his characters,—which makes prudes of his women, and coxcombs of his men. Every thing is too conscious in his works. Every thing is distinctly brought home to the mind of the actors in the scene, which is a fault undoubtedly: but then it must be confessed, every thing is brought home in its full force to the mind of the reader also; and we feel the same interest in the story as if it were our own. Can anything be more beautiful or more affecting than Pamela's reproaches to her "lumpish heart," when she is sent away from her master's at her own request; its lightness, when she is sent for back; the joy which the conviction of the sincerity of his love diffuses in her heart, like the coming on of spring; the artifice of the stuff gown; the meeting with Lady Davers after her marriage; and the trial-scene with her husband? Who ever remained insensible to the passion of Lady Clementina, except Sir Charles Grandison himself, who was the object of it? Clarissa is, however, his masterpiece, if we except Lovelace. If she is fine in herself, she is still finer in his account of her. With that foil, her purity is dazzling indeed: and she who could triumph by her virtue, and the force of her love, over the regality of Lovelace's mind, his wit, his person, his accomplishments, and his spirit, conquers all hearts. I should suppose that never sympathy more deep or sincere was excited than by the heroine of Richard-

son's romance, except by the calamities of real life. The links in this wonderful chain of interest are not more finely wrought, than their whole weight is overwhelming and irresistible. Who can forget the exquisite gradations of her long dying-scene, or the closing of the coffin-lid, when Miss Howe comes to take her last leave of her friend; or the heart-breaking reflection that *Clarissa* makes on what was to have been her wedding-day? Well does a certain writer exclaim—

“Books are a real world, both pure and good,
Round which, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
Our pastime and our happiness may grow!”

Richardson's wit was unlike that of any other writer—his humour was so too. Both were the effect of intense activity of mind—laboured, and yet completely effectual. I might refer to *Lovelace's* reception and description of *Hickman*, when he calls out *Death* in his ear, as the name of the person with whom *Clarissa* had fallen in love; and to the scene at the glove-shop. What can be more magnificent than his enumeration of his companions—“*Belton*, so pert and so pimply—*Tourville*, so fair and so foppish!” etc. In casuistry this author is quite at home; and, with a boldness greater even than his puritanical severity, has exhausted every topic on virtue and vice. There is another peculiarity in Richardson, not perhaps so uncommon, which is, his systematically preferring his most insipid characters to his finest, though both were equally his own invention, and he must be supposed to have understood something of their qualities. Thus he preferred the little, selfish, affected, insignificant *Miss Byron*, to the divine *Clementina*; and again, *Sir Charles Grandison*, to the nobler *Lovelace*. I have nothing to say in favour of *Lovelace's* morality; but *Sir Charles* is the prince of coxcombs,—whose eye was

never once taken from his own person, and his own virtues; and there is nothing which excites so little sympathy as this excessive egotism.

It remains to speak of Sterne; and I shall do it in few words. There is more of *mannerism* and affectation in him, and a more immediate reference to preceding authors; but his excellences, where he is excellent, are of the first order. His characters are intellectual and inventive, like Richardson's; but totally opposite in the execution. The one are made out by continuity, and patient repetition of touches: the others, by glancing transitions and graceful apposition. His style is equally different from Richardson's: it is at times the most rapid, the most happy, the most idiomatic of any that is to be found. It is the pure essence of English conversational style. His works consist only of *morceaux*—of brilliant passages. I wonder that Goldsmith, who ought to have known better, should call him "a dull fellow." His wit is poignant, though artificial; and his characters (though the groundwork of some of them had been laid before) have yet invaluable original differences; and the spirit of the execution, the master-strokes constantly thrown into them, are not to be surpassed. It is sufficient to name them;—Yorick, Dr. Slop, Mr. Shandy, My Uncle Toby, Trim, Susanna, and the Widow Wadman. In these he has contrived to oppose, with equal felicity and originality, two characters, one of pure intellect, and the other of pure good nature, in My Father and My Uncle Toby. There appears to have been in Sterne a vein of dry, sarcastic humour, and of extreme tenderness of feeling; the latter sometimes carried to affectation, as in the tale of Maria, and the apostrophe to the recording angel: but at other times pure, and without blemish. The story of Le Fevre is perhaps the finest in the English language. My Father's restlessness, both of body

and mind, is inimitable. It is the model from which all those despicable performances against modern philosophy ought to have been copied, if their authors had known any thing of the subject they were writing about. My Uncle Toby is one of the finest compliments ever paid to human nature. He is the most unoffending of God's creatures ; or, as the French express it, *un tel petit bon homme !* Of his bowling-green, his sieges, and his amours, who would say or think any thing amiss !

IX

CHARACTER OF MR. BURKE, 1807 *

THE following speech is perhaps the fairest specimen I could give of Mr. Burke's various talents as a speaker. The subject itself is not the most interesting, nor does it admit of that weight and closeness of reasoning which he displayed on other occasions. But there is no single speech which can convey a satisfactory idea of his powers of mind: to do him justice, it would be necessary to quote all his works; the only specimen of Burke is, *all that he wrote*. With respect to most other speakers, a specimen is generally enough, or more than enough. When you are acquainted with their manner, and see what proficiency they have made in the mechanical exercise of their profession, with what facility they can borrow a simile, or round a period, how dexterously they can argue, and object, and rejoin, you are satisfied; there is no other difference in their speeches than what arises from the difference of the subjects. But this was not the case with Burke. He brought his subjects along with him; he drew his materials from himself. The only limits which circumscribed his variety were the stores of his own mind. His stock of ideas did not consist of a few meagre facts, meagrely stated, of half a dozen common-places tortured in a thousand different ways; but his mine of wealth was a profound understanding, inexhaustible as the human heart, and various as

* This character was written in a fit of extravagant candour, at a time when I thought I could do justice, or more than justice, to an enemy, without betraying a cause.

the sources of nature. He therefore enriched every subject to which he applied himself, and new subjects were only the occasions of calling forth fresh powers of mind which had not been before exerted. It would therefore be in vain to look for the proof of his powers in any one of his speeches or writings: they all contain some additional proof of power. In speaking of Burke, then, I shall speak of the whole compass and circuit of his mind—not of that small part or section of him which I have been able to give: to do otherwise would be like the story of the man who put the brick in his pocket, thinking to shew it as the model of a house. I have been able to manage pretty well with respect to all my other speakers, and curtailed them down without remorse. It was easy to reduce them within certain limits, to fix their spirit, and condense their variety; by having a certain quantity given, you might infer all the rest; it was only the same thing over again. But who can bind Proteus, or confine the roving flight of genius?

Burke's writings are better than his speeches, and indeed his speeches are writings. But he seemed to feel himself more at ease, to have a fuller possession of his faculties in addressing the public, than in addressing the House of Commons. Burke was *raised* into public life: and he seems to have been prouder of this new dignity than became so great a man. For this reason, most of his speeches have a sort of parliamentary preamble to them: there is an air of affected modesty, and ostentatious trifling in them: he seems fond of coqueting with the House of Commons, and is perpetually calling the Speaker out to dance a minuet with him, before he begins. There is also something like an attempt to stimulate the superficial dulness of his hearers by exciting their surprise, by running into extravagance: and he sometimes demeans himself by condescending to what may be considered as bordering too much upon buf-

foenery, for the amusement of the company. Those lines of Milton were admirably applied to him by some one—"The elephant to make them sport wreathed his proboscis lithe." The truth is, that he was out of his place in the House of Commons; he was eminently qualified to shine as a man of genius, as the instructor of mankind, as the brightest luminary of his age: but he had nothing in common with that motley crew of knights, citizens, and burgesses. He could not be said to be "native and endued unto that element." He was above it; and never appeared like himself, but when, forgetful of the idle clamours of party, and of the little views of little men, he appealed to his country, and the enlightened judgment of mankind.

I am not going to make an idle panegyric on Burke (he has no need of it); but I cannot help looking upon him as the chief boast and ornament of the English House of Commons. What has been said of him is, I think, strictly true, that "he was the most eloquent man of his time: his wisdom was greater than his eloquence." The only public man that in my opinion can be put in any competition with him, is Lord Chatham: and he moved in a sphere so very remote, that it is almost impossible to compare them. But though it would perhaps be difficult to determine which of them excelled most in his particular way, there is nothing in the world more easy than to point out in what their peculiar excellences consisted. They were in every respect the reverse of each other. Chatham's eloquence was popular: his wisdom was altogether plain and practical. Burke's eloquence was that of the poet; of the man of high and unbounded fancy: his wisdom was profound and contemplative. Chatham's eloquence was calculated to make men *act*; Burke's was calculated to make them *think*. Chatham could have roused the fury of a multi-

tude, and wielded their physical energy as he pleased: Burke's eloquence carried conviction into the mind of the retired and lonely student, opened the recesses of the human breast, and lighted up the face of nature around him. Chatham supplied his hearers with motives to immediate action: Burke furnished them with *reasons* for action which might have little effect upon them at the time, but for which they would be the wiser and better all their lives after. In research, in originality, in variety of knowledge, in richness of invention, in depth and comprehension of mind, Burke had as much the advantage of Lord Chatham as he was excelled by him in plain common sense, in strong feeling, in steadiness of purpose, in vehemence, in warmth, in enthusiasm, and energy of mind. Burke was the man of genius, of fine sense, and subtle reasoning; Chatham was a man of clear understanding, of strong sense, and violent passions. Burke's mind was satisfied with speculation: Chatham's was essentially *active*: it could not rest without an object. The power which governed Burke's mind was his Imagination; that which gave its *impetus* to Chatham's was Will. The one was almost the creature of pure intellect, the other of physical temperament.

There are two very different ends which a man of genius may propose to himself either in writing or speaking, and which will accordingly give birth to very different styles. He can have but one of these two objects; either to enrich or strengthen the mind; either to furnish us with new ideas, to lead the mind into new trains of thought, to which it was before unused, and which it was incapable of striking out for itself; or else to collect and embody what we already knew, to rivet our old impressions more deeply; to make what was before plain still plainer, and to give to that which was familiar all the effect of novelty. In the one case we receive an accession to the stock of our ideas; in

the other, an additional degree of life and energy is infused into them: our thoughts continue to flow in the same channels, but their pulse is quickened and invigorated. I do not know how to distinguish these different styles better than by calling them severally the inventive and refined, or the impressive and vigorous styles. It is only the subject-matter of eloquence, however, which is allowed to be remote or obscure. The things in themselves may be subtle and recondite, but they must be dragged out of their obscurity and brought struggling to the light; they must be rendered plain and palpable, (as far as it is in the wit of man to do so) or they are no longer eloquence. That which by its natural impenetrability, and in spite of every effort, remains dark and difficult, which is impervious to every ray, on which the imagination can shed no lustre, which can be clothed with no beauty, is not a subject for the orator or poet. At the same time it cannot be expected that abstract truths or profound observations should ever be placed in the same strong and dazzling points of view as natural objects and mere matters of fact. It is enough if they receive a reflex and borrowed lustre, like that which cheers the first dawn of morning, where the effect of surprise and novelty gilds every object, and the joy of beholding another world gradually emerging out of the gloom of night, "a new creation rescued from his reign," fills the mind with a sober rapture. Philosophical eloquence is in writing what *chiaro scuro* is in painting; he would be a fool who should object that the colours in the shaded part of a picture were not so bright as those on the opposite side; the eye of the connoisseur receives an equal delight from both, balancing the want of brilliancy and effect with the greater delicacy of the tints, and difficulty of the execution. In judging of Burke, therefore, we are to consider first the style of eloquence which he adopted, and secondly